

The Harmony of All Religions



by
Maharishi Santsevi Ji Paramahans Maharaj

सत् असत् हर अक्षर अगुण सगुण पर, अलख, अगम, अज, अदिलोक, अनादि अनन्त स्वरूपी, अनामी, अधामी, परधाम, परमपुरुष, पुरुषोत्तम, परमात्मा

तुरीयातीत पद

शब्दातीत पद

परमनिर्वाण पद

अथ वर्ण पर परमपद
उत्तर

ॐ सतशब्द सदगुरु

हिरण्य गर्भ
समष्टि प्राण
आदि शब्द
आदि नाम
सार शब्द
सत्य नाम

संपूर्ण प्राणियों की इन्द्रियों के आधार स्वरूप

साध्यावस्था धारिणी मूल प्रकृति (जड़तात्मक) मण्डल

भँवर गुफा
सोहं ब्रह्म

महाशून्य

शून्य
रं ब्रह्म

त्रिकुटी **सूर्य** मायाब्रह्म

ज्योति महल दलकमल
विरजन सहस्वार

ASTRAL

अक्षर चक्र
द्वितीय वर्ण
पुस्तक
अक्षर

अक्षर चक्र
द्वितीय वर्ण
पुस्तक
अक्षर

अक्षर चक्र
द्वितीय वर्ण
पुस्तक
अक्षर

अक्षर चक्र
द्वितीय वर्ण
पुस्तक
अक्षर

अक्षर चक्र
द्वितीय वर्ण
पुस्तक
अक्षर



Tamas-world of decay Rajas-World of Activity Sattwa-World of Purity, Truth

Subtle Causal Supra Casual Oneness

Realm Beyond Sound Absolute Nirvana


Turiyatita State Realm beyond all Name and Form

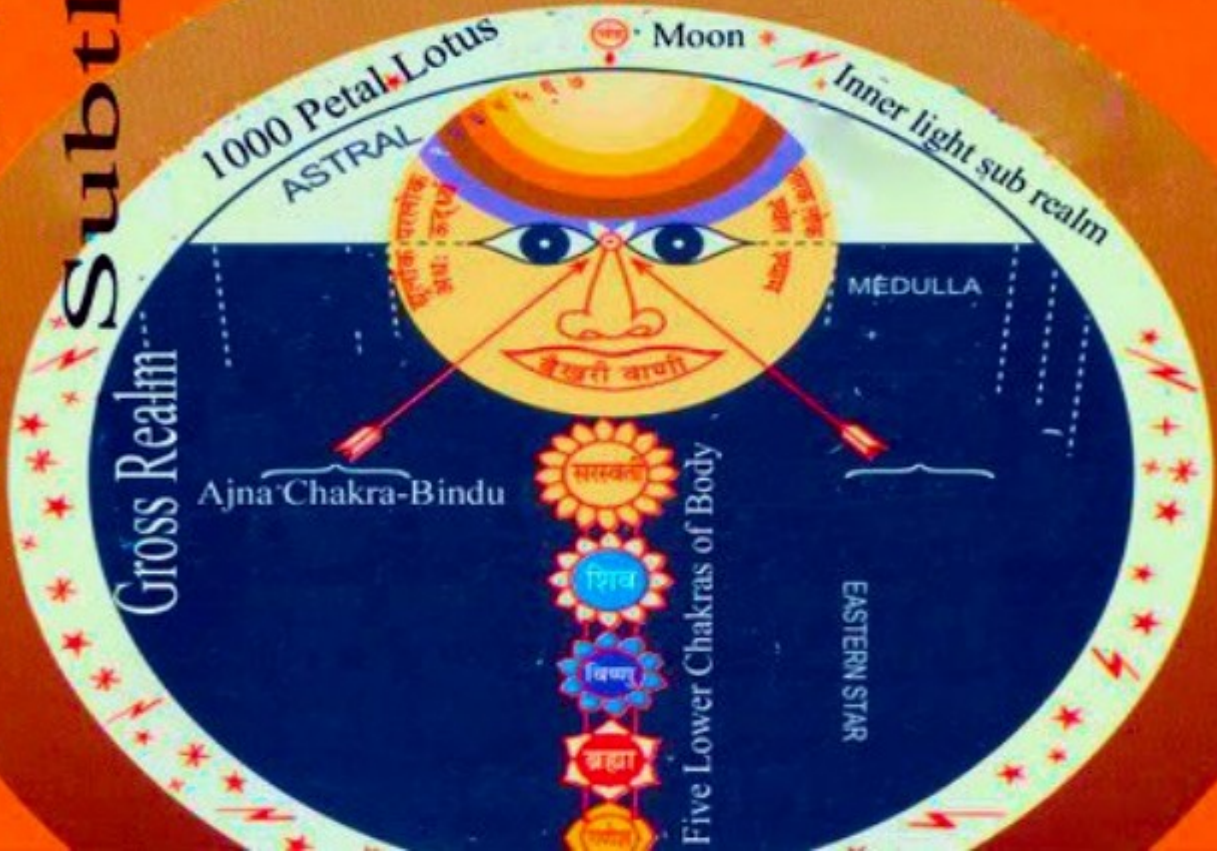
Realm Beyond Celestial - Realm of Infinite Being,
Truth and Knowledge-Cosmic Consciousness

Bhanwar Gupha- Whirling Cave
Soham Brahma

Mahashunya- Great Emptiness-Great Void

Shunya- Emptiness
Highest Celestial Realm

Trikuti  Realm of Celestial Sun



Gross Realm

Ajna Chakra-Bindu

Five Lower Chakras of Body

EASTERN STAR

MEDULLA

Inner light sub realm

Moon

1000 Petal Lotus
ASTRAL





Harmony of All Religions

Santmat

By

**Maharishi Santsevi Ji
Maharaj**

Translated from Hindi by

Veena Rani Howard

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*A Humble Offering
To*

*Maharishi Santsevi Ji Maharaj—
The Guiding Light of My Life*

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Editor's Note

The old cliché, “We are the citizens of the world” has never been so true as it is today. Swift air travel and the pervasive power of the internet have shrunk the distances—“the Far East” no longer seems far and mystifying. The rapidly accelerating rate of globalization in the 21st century has had far-reaching effects on the hearts and minds of people everywhere: a great sense of liberty has emerged, and a deep feeling of interconnectedness between all the beings of the world has been generated. However, in this rapidly changing world, these very same technological advances, and the ensuing hasty rise of industrialization also pose a new threat to ancient cultures by testing established moral values and reshaping the religious paradigms.

In this age of disappearing boundaries—nations becoming melting pots of a myriad of cultures—the validity of the ancient faith traditions, along with their myths and ethos, are facing countless challenges. Some people fear a cataclysmic end to the world or, at least, to the “world” as we know it. Some factions are outraged by the emerging patterns of world culture and by the reshaping of ancient ways of religion. The result: distrust, anger, hatred and animosity. The fiercest expression of this anger and distrust became most visible



in the events of September 11, 2001. On this day the world helplessly watched as the symbols of global and industrial progress—the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City— came crashing to the ground.

From that day forward our whole world has changed. The “shock and awe” experienced by people everywhere who witnessed the destruction of the towers sent shock waves through all the established value systems of the world. The ensuing feelings of fear and distrust have maimed the hearts of people worldwide and have paralyzed the sense of clear vision. But this time of despair must be taken as an opportunity, an opening to search for new horizons, to re-assess our values, to understand and respect other cultures and religions. This is exactly what the great sant, Maharishi Shri Santsevi Ji, has sought to accomplish through his book, *Sarvadharmā Samanvya (The Harmony of All Religions)*. Shri Santsevi Ji Maharaj has been teaching the Santmat tradition for many decades and believes in the underlying principles found in all the prominent religions of the world.

In *The Harmony of All Religions*, Swami Ji delves deeply into each of these strands of the religious



traditions: the Vedic tradition (*dharma*), Buddhism, Jainism, the Judeo-Christian tradition, Sikhism, and Islam. By illustrating the main tenets of these religions together in one volume, Maharishi Santsevi Ji, in his wisdom, has shown that all of these religions, so seemingly different in nature, are nevertheless inherently rooted in the one Truth, which is expressed variously.

Traditionally, Santmat is concerned with the esoteric teachings of the various sants, but Swami Ji has extended the scope of Santmat by relating it to the core of each of the major religions of the world, through survey of the sacred texts and teachings of their prominent exponents. He explores the fundamental principles within each of the religious traditions. At the same time, Swami Ji is careful to not undermine the external doctrines and expressions which give form and structure to these traditions.

Shri Santsevi Ji has thereby confirmed the ancient Vedic saying: *Truth is one; the sages speak of it in various ways*. The purpose of religion (*re-legare* in Latin, meaning ‘to unite’) is, indeed, not to divide, but to unite. The intent of this presentation is to sustain unity and harmony, as the Sanskrit word *dharma* connotes. *Dharma*, often translated as ‘religion,’ indicates the



principle of sustenance and holding together. *Dharma* functions to bring peace, love and unity, and at the same time to remove hate, distrust and divisive forces.

Through this book Shri Santsevi Ji seeks to present a path that will instill harmony instead of conflict, establish trust in place of doubt, and replace hate with love. This volume will serve as a balm to tender wounds, and may provide hope to despairing hearts. It points the way beyond a mere outer harmony of apparently divergent religions, which could be possible by an intellectual analysis of ideas. But even more deeply, Swamiji's intent is to invite fellow human beings to realize inner peace and harmony by walking on the path tread by the great saints, seers and prophets.

In the original form of this treatise, *The Harmony of All Religions*, Maharishi Santsevi Ji also includes a study of the mystical principles of Santmat that are concealed within the teachings of the major theistic sects of Hinduism. These include, the worship of Lord Shiva (a Hindu deity); the worship of Surya (the Sun god of ancient times); the worship of Lord Rama (the incarnation of Vishnu, as worshipped in the *Ramacharitamanas* by Sant Tulsidas); and the worship of Bhagavati (the goddess, the principle of Divine



Energy). As commonly understood, these sects are associated only with the personal god or the qualified form of the Divine, worshipped through rituals and devotional practices. But Maharishi Santsevi Ji underscores the transcendent elements of the Divine, and the references to the esoteric practices of Divine Light and Sound that are present in the literature of these sects. However, in this present translation we are unable to include this unique and valuable exegesis of Swami Ji. We hope that it could be made available to readers at a later date.

This translation was undertaken to render the original Hindi exposition, *Sarvadharmā Samanvya* (Harmony of All Religions) into a more widely accessible English version. The task of translation is always a difficult one, but this text presented even more challenges with its frequent references to the texts of different religions in a variety of languages. These included Sanskrit, Hindi, Pali, Prakrit, Gurumukhi, Avadhi, several regional vernaculars of Northern India, Arabic, and English. Moreover, many terms in the original languages have no equivalent in the English language.

The primary task of this translation has been to preserve the voice of Swami Ji and thus render a translation



which remains faithful to the original. This book was initially written for the native people of India and, specifically, for those who would already have some familiarity with the principles of Santmat. But in the course of development, and for the purpose of making it accessible to a wider audience, we have added many explanatory notes.

Shri Santsevi Ji's concern has been to reach people in all walks of life, especially the underprivileged and illiterate masses who reside in the deep villages of India. Accordingly, the style of the book follows the oral tradition, in which repetition of ideas is frequent and often desirable. In this translation some editorial license had to be taken to make the text accessible to the western mind. All editorial decisions have been made for the purpose of clarifying the original intent of the author. In a few cases the editor has applied the comments suggested by readers and students.

We offer this translation to Swami Shri Santsevi Ji on the occasion of his 86th Birthday. Swami Ji has inspired and guided us through every step along the way. We are deeply grateful for his monumental endeavor and this momentous treatise, unique but essential to the Santmat tradition. Without his encouragement and loving



guidance it would not have been possible to produce this translated and edited version of his book. May he always guide us!

My heart felt gratitude is given to Mr. Don Howard for his encouragement, and continual support with the tasks of editing and formatting the manuscript. Many thanks are extended to Mrs. Barbara Speck (United States), a spiritual seeker, who generously and selflessly devoted her time and effort to proofreading the final version of the English edition. We are also grateful to Swami Ashuhtosh Baba (Bhagalpur) for his clarification of some difficult terms. We are thankful as well to Professor N. Das, Professor and Head of the Department of Humanities (English), B.I.T. Sindri, (Dhanbad), for his careful review of the manuscript.

Veena Rani Howard
Santmat Society of North America
December 20, 2006

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Maharishi Santsevi Ji Maharaj`s Letter of Blessing to the Editor

सर्वधर्म समन्वय एक ऐसी पुस्तक है, जो धर्म और अध्यात्म का मर्म जानने के इच्छुक व्यक्तियों का मार्गदर्शन करती है। इस पुस्तक का अध्ययन कर व्यक्ति अपने धर्म के साथ अन्य धर्मों की सारभूत बातों से भी परिचित हो जाता है। अबतक यह पुस्तक मात्र भारती भाषा (हिन्दी) में प्रकाशित हो पाई थी, जिस कारण मात्र हिन्दी-भाषी लोग ही इससे लाभ उठा पा रहे थे। मेरी पुत्रीवत् प्यारी शिष्या अमेरिका-निवासी श्रीमती वीणा रानी होवार्ड ने अंग्रेजी भाषा में इसका अनुवाद कर इसकी उपयोगिता को व्यापक आधार दे दिया है। अंग्रेजी विश्व की सर्वाधिक लोकप्रिय और व्यापक जानाधार वाली भाषा है। इस कारण अब देश के साथ विदेशों में भी जिज्ञासुजन इस पुस्तक का अध्ययन-मनन कर लाभान्वित हो सकेंगे।

आध्यात्मिक विषयों का भाषा-अनुवाद सदा से ही कठिन कार्य रहा है। पुस्तक की मूल भावनाओं को यथावत् अभिव्यक्ति देने का यह गुरुतर कार्य सफलतापूर्वक संपादित कर अनुवादिका ने अत्यन्त प्रशंसनीय कार्य किया है। उसके इस पावन प्रयास के लिए धन्यवाद सहित मेरा आशीर्वाद है।

शुभचिन्तक
'संतसेवी'

Maharishi Santsevi Ji
2006

December

Translation:

Sarvadharm Samanvya (The Harmony of All Religions) is a kind of book that guides those who are eager to learn the essence of religion and spirituality. A study of this book provides the reader with the esoteric teachings of one's own religion as well as the religions of others. Until now this book was only available in the Indian language (Hindi), therefore, only the Hindi speaking people were able to reap the benefit of reading this book.

My dear like daughter disciple, Shrimati Veena Rani Howard, who now resides in the United States of America, translated this treatise into English. With this translation she extended the scope of readership since English is the world's most widely used international language. Now people, from countries other than India, desirous of learning about the essential Truth will also be able to benefit by reading and reflecting on this book.

Undoubtedly, the translation of religious issues written in languages other than our own has always been a difficult task due to culture-specific terminology and ideology. The translator has accomplished an admirable task by successfully editing and interpreting the core ideas of the treatise accordingly for the Western readers. For this holy effort I give her my thanks and also my blessings.

Swami Santsevi Ji
December 2006



Maharishi Santsevi Ji Maharaj:

A Biography

Maharishi Santsevi Ji Maharaj is a renowned saint, an exceptional Spiritual Guide, and a unique social reformer of the 21st Century. Shri Santsevi Ji is the fourth Guru in the Santmat lineage of great spiritual masters: Sant Tulsi Sahab, Baba Devi Sahab, and Maharishi Mehi Paramhans Ji Maharaj.

Shri Santsevi Ji was born on December 20, 1920 in a small village of Bihar state, the most impoverished state of India. His family name was Mahavira. From his early childhood Mahavira was greatly interested in religious and spiritual matters. He enjoyed reading the scriptures and the poetry of saints. He was particularly fond of the *Ramayana*, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Ramacharitmanas*, and the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*.

After attending middle school he began home schooling. His intellect was keen and his heart tender. He found joy in teaching and tutoring younger students and in nursing the sick. He always felt great compassion for the sick and oppressed. This led him to study homeopathic medicine in order to help the poor and to nurse the ailing. Through his experience with sickness and



death, Mahavira witnessed the impermanence and suffering that pervades human life. As a result, the seeds of detachment became firmly rooted in his heart. He became detached from the worldly life. After considerable reflection, he chose a life of renunciation, even though his family members exerted great pressure to persuade him otherwise.

In 1939, Mahavira came in contact with the great sage of the Santmat tradition, Maharishi Mehi, who had a hermitage in Bhagalpur, Bihar. Upon seeing Maharishi Mehi, Mahavira felt drawn to him, as though he had known him for many lifetimes. Mahavira was also greatly intrigued by the principles and practices of Santmat. He approached Shri Maharishi Mehi for initiation in Santmat. Maharishi Mehi soon became very impressed by the sincerity and devotion of this young man and agreed to initiate him. Mahavira began his meditation and service of Guru, and also continued his work as a tutor.

In the heart of Mahavira a keen desire arose to remain permanently in the service of his Guru. His desire was fulfilled in 1949 when Maharishi Mehi gave him permission to stay in the Ashram in his service. Mahavira devoted his days and nights to taking care of the needs of his Guru, thereby following the ancient Vedic model of the Guru-disciple relationship. He never



cared for his personal comfort when he was serving his Guru's needs: cooking food, doing laundry, keeping track of expenses, editing his writings, and traveling to villages with him to teach the principles of Santmat to the poor, oppressed, and marginalized. Maharishi Mehi, pleased with this selfless service, gave him the name *Santsevi*, meaning "he who serves saints." From that day Mahavira came to be known as Santsevi.

As Maharishi Mehi advanced in age, he began to transfer his responsibilities to Shri Santsevi Ji. He authorized Shri Santsevi Ji to give initiation to spiritual seekers, to respond to their inquiries, and to guide them through the inner experiences of their spiritual journeys. He came to be seen as the prominent disciple among Maharishi Mehi's chief devotees. Maharishi Mehi often said, "As the English letters Q and U cannot be separated, so too Santsevi and I are connected. Wherever I may live Santsevi will also reside." Shri Santsevi Ji remained in the service of his Guru until Maharishi Mehi's passing at the age of 101 in July of 1986. After the passing of Shri Maharishi Mehi, Shri Santsevi Ji was immediately recognized as the torchbearer of Santmat. Since then, he has ceaselessly and selflessly been continuing the service of Santmat.



Shri Santsevi Maharaj Ji's personality is charismatic as a result of his accomplishments on the path to the realization of Truth. Even though he is a learned man, his knowledge goes beyond the confines of the human intellect. Despite the fact that he never attended a class in a university or a college, a number of Ph.D. students are pursuing research on his writings. He has no formal education in any Divinity or Religious school, yet scholars from various disciplines come to him to understand the subtle interpretations found in sacred texts and literature: the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Bible*, the *Koran* and the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*, as well as various writings of the saints. He is well versed in several languages, including Sanskrit, Hindi, Urdu, Bangala, Gurumukhi, Nepali, Maithali and other dialects of India. He has written and translated about twenty books elucidating the subject of yoga, philosophy, and the teachings of Santmat. His exposition of sacred texts is prolific, arising from his profound personal experience of the Truth.

Santmat and Maharishi Santsevi Ji

Maharishi Santsevi Ji is the present exponent (*acharya*) of Santmat, the branch which is directly linked to the lineage of Sant Tulsi Sahab. The word Santmat, usually written as Sant



Mat, literally means the “point of view” or the “conviction of the sants and sages.” Historically, the Santmat movement was not a homogenous movement; but the term is a generic label for the Sant movement in the northern part of India, beginning around the 12th century. The early sants, such as Kabir, Raidas, Namdev and Mirabai, represented a shift in religious and social attitudes—on the one hand, freedom from sectarian boundaries and ritualistic confinements; on the other hand, direct communion with the Divine without mediation of any authority or liturgy.

The word sant is derived from the Sanskrit word *sat* (Truth, Reality). The root meaning is ‘one who knows the truth’ or ‘who has experienced Ultimate Reality.’ Thus, a *sant* is a person who has achieved *Shanti* (inner tranquility) as a result of union with the Divine, as in mystical enlightenment.

The word *sant* is translated “saint” in English. However, both in etymology and definition, there are significant differences that get lost in translation. The English word saint is derived from the Latin word *sanctus*, which has come to mean a “good person whose life is moral,” or a “holy being.” Thus, in English a saint is thought of as a “spiritual exemplar,” and the word has been attached to a wide variety of gurus and holy men and women.



But, in Sanskrit, the dimension of inner unity with the Truth is inherent in the word *sant*. Some of the sants come from the lower castes, and some of them are even from the untouchable class, but they have enjoyed an honorable status in the tradition. (Although we use *sant* and *saint* interchangeably in this book, we imply the original meaning of the word *sant* for both.)

Santmat, the Way of Sages and Sants, as we prefer to refer to it, not only emphasizes a life of moral rectitude, but underlines the inner journey for God realization, or Liberation. Therefore, Santmat is not confined to the beliefs, rituals, and dogmas of any specific religion. It is universal in nature and embraces the truths found in most of the world's sacred texts and religious traditions, even while not advocating any particular religion. Santmat encompasses a set of ageless moral values, a belief in a Higher Power, and even more important, a methodology for realization of the Highest Reality. This method elaborates the path of Divine Light and Sound through which one attains the state of absolute Peace within one's own self. The unifying philosophy of Santmat leads the way beyond the boundaries of sectarianism, religious fanaticism, and communal distrust which plague our world today. Maharishi Santsevi Ji has taught the teachings of Santmat to more than a million people from multiple religions and from many countries.



Social Reformer

Maharishi Santsevi Ji is an exceptional social reformer. Although he has traveled all over India, his teachings have been dedicated to the poorest of the poor of Bihar. And, even at the age of 86, he unceasingly continues to teach and travel to the deep villages of India and Nepal. His approach to social reform is threefold:

- Sustaining age-old ethical values: Maharishi Santsevi Ji believes that social problems arise from the lack of fundamental ethical values. He has taught people to abide by five ethical principles: abstain from lying, stealing, adultery, violence, and use of intoxicating substances. The ethical life is the foundation of all social reforms. While the world is burning with the fires of addiction, depression and distrust, the moral commitments required by Maharishi Santsevi Ji provide tools for a life of balance, peace and harmony. It is striking to see his followers from all walks of life adhering to these principles, even in the middle of the modern world culture which is in the grip of enticing material values.



- Sustaining the fundamental equality of all human beings: Maharishi demonstrates through his teaching that all people—people of different caste, color, race and gender—must be treated equally and with dignity. He teaches the ancient path of meditation (traditionally restricted only to the men of higher classes) to men and women of all castes, religions, and social status, without discrimination. He proclaims: “All are worthy to walk on the path of enlightenment.” For this claim he often faced severe criticism from many in the society—a society, founded on an inherent caste system and a patriarchal social hierarchy.
- Sustaining social peace and harmony through Inner Peace: His basic teaching is that in order to sustain outer social and personal harmony, one must follow the inner path of meditation for self-realization, as taught by all major religious traditions. This path requires devotion, not fanaticism, and both belief in and experience of the One God, not mere faith and superstition.

Maharishi Santsevi Ji is a living example of what he teaches. He represents a very significant link in the tradition



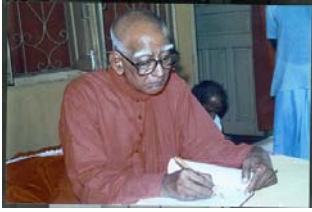
of saints. His ideology of harmony, compassion, moral rectitude, and inner realization is a testament to the eternal nature of truth, which is sought after by various religious leaders throughout our known history.

Maharishi Santsevi Ji has refused many offers to come to the western world. His heart is committed to teaching the native villagers, tribal people, and aborigines. His dedication to the service of society and his dedication to the common good are demonstrated by his ceaseless efforts to serve suffering humanity. In today's world this is an unsurpassable task. Swami Santsevi Ji remains committed to teaching the path of Truth to all, and to revealing the harmony inherent in all religions. Maharishi Santsevi Ji illuminates the path, leading to a direct experience of the Truth within.

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Point of Departure



Today's scientific world is acclaimed for its rapid accumulation of material knowledge and accelerating progress. But with the same speed the great majority of people are moving away from non-material spiritual knowledge. This term, Spiritual knowledge, should not be confused with specific creeds and sects. All around us we see the social fabric being ripped apart by religious fundamentalism, intolerance, and narrow-mindedness. The acts of violence motivated by religious fanaticism could not have been committed by minds inspired with genuine spiritual knowledge. Those who cultivate the fire of hatred and prejudice in their hearts are imprisoned in the narrow cells of their religions, or what they have interpreted their religions to be. They look upon the followers of other religions with distrust and even malice. Such spite cannot be what the founders of the various great religions had intended as their gift to humanity. Hatred and exclusivity bring harm not only to those who are directly targeted, but also—and to a greater degree—violent fanatics spoil their own spiritual state.



Religion (*dharma*) was given to humanity to provide a civilized path for the reformation of character in order that its adherents might reach the ultimate goal (God). But today, it seems that even religion has lost track of its purpose. Therefore, it is essential, in this current environment of religious crisis, to underscore the similar—in the end, *identical*—underlying concepts of the various religions. By this means it is possible to bridge the ever-enlarging gulf that appears to separate the different religious traditions and between their followers. This “gulf” is actually an imaginary difference. It is often the result of superficial (exoteric) interpretations of a given religion which begin to dissolve when one investigates the tradition at a deeper (esoteric) level. When the various traditions are seen as different statements or paths to the same goal, the very image of religion, as a provider of peace and everlasting freedom, can be re-established. This book is a small attempt in this direction.

What is *Dharma*?

What is religion (*dharma*¹)? The Sanskrit word, *dharma*, is generally defined as “righteousness” or “duty.” Thus, in its broadest sense *dharma* means performing one’s sacred duty and



following the traditional ethical codes of the community in which one lives. “Dharma is the sustainer of the social life.”

It is also defined as the way to the Higher Truth. Far from being unnatural or contrived, *dharmā* is a natural quality or trait of an individual, an inseparable part of the psyche. *Dharma* is also that deed or duty the result of which is described as the attainment of heaven. Noble deeds, good behavior, and benevolent actions are all *dharmic* in nature. *Dharma* is inner nature, an inherent good tendency, and a daily prescribed moral and social duty.

Dharma as Virtue

*The Laws of Manu*² describe the eightfold attributes of *dharmā*: patience, forgiveness, self-control, non-stealing, purity, control of the senses, wisdom, knowledge, truth, and tranquility. Over the course of time, Jain³ *dharmā* has also delineated the list of characteristics as follows: right forgiveness, right restraint, right purity, right truth, right self-control, right mortification, right renunciation, right humility, and right celibacy.

For the purpose of making *dharmā* accessible to all people, Sage Manu has simplified and condensed the ten attributes of *dharmā*



into five ethical laws: non-violence, truth, non-stealing, purity of body and mind, and control of the senses.⁴ These same moral laws are found in all the major religions, East and West. Let us first consider the ethical laws of non-violence (*ahimsa*) and truth (*satya*).

Complexity of *Dharma* Ethics

The Mahabharata (ch.11/13) says:

Non-violence(ahimsa) is the greatest of all laws (dharma).

This principle of non-violence is the essential *dharma* (virtue) for religions based on the *Vedas*, but as well, it is also considered of prime importance in other religions. For example, Buddhism (*Dhammapada*, 17:3) and Christianity (*Bible*, Exodus 20:13; Matthew 5:5, 5:7; 5:21; 5:38-39) also require their adherents to practice non-violence. Taking life, however, is not the only kind of violence that is prohibited. The principle of non-violence also includes not hurting some one's mind or body. Within the Indian traditions, it also entails not doing harm to any living being, including animals. All people in this world agree that non-violence is the greatest *dharma* principle to be followed.



But now imagine a situation in which someone is trying to take our life, or rape our wife or daughter, or start a fire in our house or, steal our money. If we are unprotected and some evil person has a weapon, what should we do? Should we simply ignore that evil person, or just tell him that non-violence is the most important *dharma*? And if he does not listen to, or pay no heed to our plea, should we try to control him with whatever power we have?

Sage Manu advises us for this kind of difficult situation:

*One should not hesitate to dispatch that evil person and we should not care if he is a guru, an old person, a child, scholar or brahmin.*⁵

Under such circumstances, if the individual kills the aggressor in the effort to protecting himself/herself, he/she is not considered guilty of the sin of killing, because in fact the evil person was killed by his own lawlessness. Another example: The killing of a fetus is considered a most heinous act. But if a child becomes dangerously breached in the womb and the mother's life is in danger, it is a moral imperative to sacrifice the child for the sake of the mother's life.

Non-violence, forgiveness, compassion and calmness (*śanti*) are described and prescribed as virtues in the *shastras* and the sacred



texts. However, it is not advised to remain resigned all the time. For instance, one must protect children from evil.

Sage Prahlad told this to his grandson, Bali:

It is not always good to forgive; neither is it good always to be angry. Even so the scholars spoke about exceptions in forgiveness.⁶

After having addressed non-violence, we should now consider the virtue of truthfulness (*satya*). In various parts of the *Mahabharata* truth is considered to be “the highest of all moral acts.”⁷

The *Mahabharata* says:

If we compare the power of truth with a thousand grand sacrifices, the merit acquired by truth will be still greater.

In the *Tatittariya Upanishad* (1/11/1) truth is given a superior place, and the other sacred duties (*dharma*) are described as secondary:

Speak Truth. Follow your moral duty.

In the *Mahabharata* there is a story where the Grandsire Bhishma was lying on a bed of arrows before his death. He teaches the essence and importance of truth, and advises Yudhishtira, the oldest son of Pandu to act only in accordance with truth. Truth



indeed is the essence of *dharma*. Similarly, a great emphasis is placed on truth in Buddhism, Christianity, and other religions.

The literal and essential meaning of truth is ‘that which always is, is permanent, is eternal, and which never lacks.’ In the *Bhagavad- Gita* Lord Krishna explains the nature of truth to Arjuna (2:16):

The unreal [that which does not exist] never is. The Real [that which truly exists] never ceases to be. The conclusion concerning these two is truly perceived by the seers of Truth.

Truth is always triumphant; non-truth is conquered.⁸ The *shastras* constantly and rightly praise truth. We should nevertheless observe carefully whether there are any exceptions to speaking the truth. Let us consider the situation where a murderer with a weapon is chasing an innocent person with the intent of killing him. If the fleeing person hides somewhere near us, should we tell the truth when the villain asks us the whereabouts of the fleeing person? Should we speak the truth and contribute to that innocent person being killed, or should we speak a lie and try to protect the life of that man? In such a circumstance, speaking truth incurs the sin of violence, and telling a lie incurs the good results associated with non-violence. So we see that there are exceptions—quite apparent ones—to telling the truth.



Again, let us consider another situation: A doctor has advised a sick child to stay away from certain kinds of foods. The child, of course, does not understand the need for such restrictions and desires to continue eating the same foods. By eating the same foods, the child's sickness may get worsen. The mother tells the child that the particular food is not in the house, and that she will give it to him when she goes to the market. In this case, the mother's false speech protects the life of the child. And once again we have a paradoxical example: a non-truth fulfills the law of non-violence (*ahimsa*, literally, non-harming). The same principle is taught in the Holy *Bible*.

Compare this to the following reference from the *Bible*:

The letter [of the law or dharma] brings death; but the spirit [of dharma] gives life. (2 Corinthians 3:6).

One must be careful not to commit a crime simply to obey an outward rule.

Non-Static Laws of *Dharma*

What do we really mean when we speak of a person's *dharma*? We must that the laws of *dharma* are not fixed. They depend on



the circumstances, culture, the time period, and the upbringing of the person. In other words, culture specific values are involved. Even though speaking truth is our *dharma*, in the actual experience of life, there are many occasions when untruth instead of truth is the appropriate behavior, or *dharma*. It happens sometimes that violence instead of non-violence will protect a life, and this will then be the appropriate behavior (*dharma*). In the *Mahabharata* it is said that in order to protect a family, an individual family member may be sacrificed; to protect a village, a family may be sacrificed; and to protect a country, an entire village may be sacrificed. But to protect one's own soul (*atman*), the whole world should be sacrificed (forsaken).

[The same principle is stated in Christian scriptures. *The Bible*: Mark 8:36:

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?].

The *Bhagavad-Gita* underscores the need for doing one's own duty (*dharma*):

Better is one's own duty (dharma) performed imperfectly than the duty (dharma) of another performed perfectly. It is better to die performing one's own duty (dharma), for it is dangerous to follow the duty (dharma) of another (3:35)



Paradoxically, in the *Gita* it is also said:

*Abandon all dharmas; come to Me alone for refuge.
Do not grieve, for I will release you from all evils.
(18:66).*

When compared, these two verses spoken by Lord Krishna may seem contradictory in nature to most people. They are forced to think: “Is it good to sacrifice our own self for our *dharma*, or should we abandon our *dharma* and take refuge only in God?” In such a difficult situation, man becomes frozen into inaction. We can see an example of this confusion in the story at the beginning of the *Gita* where Arjuna becomes immobilized by his dilemma.

When confronted with such contradictions, we begin to experience ourselves, that the path of “*dharma is subtle*,”⁹ and that “*it (dharma) is unfathomable and too difficult*”¹⁰ for us to comprehend. Therefore, to understand the subtle secrets of *dharma*, we need a Sat Guru (genuine, true, and authentic spiritual teacher) to guide us through these difficult moments. As Lord Krishna guides Arjuna who had fallen in a state of despair when faced with the choice of conflicting *dharmas*—go to war and not be hesitant in killing (perform the *dharma* of a *kshatriya*) or abstain from violence as it is highest *dharma*.



Lord Krishna advises in the *Bhagavad-Gita* (4: 34) to seek the instruction from those who have “seen the truth,” a seer:

Learn that by humble reverence, by inquiry and by service, the wise who have seen the truth will instruct you in knowledge.

Various Definitions of *Dharma*: *Dharma* as Inherent Nature

There are other meanings of *dharma* in addition to ‘virtue’ and ‘law.’ These include ‘quality,’ ‘inner essence,’ or ‘nature.’ We cannot separate the inherent quality from the possessor of that quality. If we did that, then, the one who possessed that quality would no longer live. For example, the nature of fire is heat or burning and the nature of ice is cold. Each sense organ also possesses one particular quality. The nature of the eye is to help one see. The nature or quality of the ear is to help one hear. The quality of the skin is the sense of touch; the quality of the tongue is taste; and the quality of the nose is smell. *Atman* (the very nature of the inner self) also has its particular quality: spiritually ascending movement.



***Dharma* as Religion**

The Sanskrit word for *dharma* can also be translated as religion. In Arabic this term is called *majhab*, and in English it is called religion; and in Sanskrit it is called *dharma*. The English word religion is derived from Latin language: the prefix *re-* means “back” or “again” and the root *lig* means “to bind.” Thus, religion is that which binds us back to our source, which unites us with God and other human beings (Similarly, we find that the Sanskrit word *yoga*, meaning path or method of union, is related to the English word “yoke”).

Returning to the Source through Inner Journey is Our *Dharma* (Natural Tendency)

Santmat (the path and teachings as taught and practiced by saints) delineates the path of union of soul with the Divine. The teachings of the saints explain the re-uniting as follows:

The individual soul has descended from the higher worlds [the Realm of the Divine] to this city of illusion, bodily existence. It has descended from the Soundless state to the essence of Sound, from that Sound to Light, and finally from the realm of Light to the realm of Darkness. The qualities (*dharmas*, *natural*



tendencies) of the sense organs draw us downward and away from our true nature. The nature of the soul (*atman*) draws us upwards and inwards and establishes us in our own true nature.

Returning to our origins involves turning inward: withdrawal of consciousness from the senses and the sense objects in order to go upward from the darkness to the realms of light and sound. [We experience this phenomenon of withdrawal as we pass from waking consciousness to deep sleep.] Another way to express this is to go inward from the external sense organs to the depth of the inner self. (Both of these expressions are the metaphors that signify the same movement). The natural tendencies of the soul (*atman*) are to move from outward to inward. The current of consciousness which is dispersed in the nine gates of the body and the senses, must be collected at the tenth gate.¹¹ The tenth gate is the gathering point of consciousness; therein lies the path for our return. The tenth gate is also known as the sixth *chakra*, the third eye, *bindu*, the center located between the two eyebrows. This is the gateway through which we leave the gates of the sense organs and enter in the divine realms and finally become established in the soul. We travel back from the Realm of Darkness to the Realm of Light, from the Light to the Divine Sound, and from the Realm of Sound to the Soundless state. This is called turning *back* to the Source.¹² This is what *dharma*



or religion really intends to teach us. This is the essence of *dharma*.

Many thousands of years ago when Krishna was teaching Arjuna, there existed only the *Vedic dharma*.¹³ Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Sikhism and the other religious paradigms had not yet emerged. There was only one *dharma* (religion) for all. There was not a question of “my *dharma*” as opposed to “your *dharma*” [here the word *dharma* is used in the sense of religion]. Yet Krishna teaches to follow one’s “own *dharma*.” Here the word *dharma* does not imply the term religion, but rather, is used to refer to one’s own inherent tendencies, the inner nature. In reality, the *dharma* of our senses is not really our own *dharma* because following the cravings of the senses only satisfies the nature of the sensory organs. Our optimal *dharma* is to follow the *dharma* of the soul (*atman*) by turning inward and returning to the source. Krishna advises Arjuna to leave the *dharma* of the senses (following the sensory desires) and to seek instead the *dharma* of *atman* (following the inner desire of absolute tranquility and bliss which is beyond the scope of senses), which truly concerns our spiritual progress. Thereby, one becomes established in one’s own nature (self).



The ideas regarding turning back to our own source are not the invention of the author of this book, but are to be found in the teachings of the saints and sages. Here are some quotes from the various saints and sages who refer to the idea of “turning back”:

Sant Kabir says:

By withdrawing (from the sense organs) and becoming absorbed in one’s own self the infinite light dawns and manifests. . .

Turn inward and move forward by gathering your dispersed mind. . .

When the water of a vessel (individual soul) merges back into the river (Inner Being; God) then we call this the state of supreme wisdom. . . .

Guru Nanak Dev says:

[Beholding] the inverted lotus which is full of nectar [indicating the joyous experiences within], now my mind goes not elsewhere.

Sant Gulal Sahab also advises to go inward:

Go inward and see the light permeating within...

Sant Tulsi Sahab says:

Turn inward and fly to the greatest heights, and leaving the various realms of existence unite your soul with the Divine.

Sant Shivnarayan Swami says:

Looking inward go inward and see the light permeating within...Lo! By closing the eyes behold the burst of light. . .



Sant Dadudayal Ji asks his disciples to seek the Divine within:

O benevolent one! Enter in your inner self, and search. He [God] is very near to you. Abandon all your worldly desires and distractions. By inverting your immature consciousness current (which tends to get distracted by senses) get established, in the self [within]...

Sant Paltu Sahib says:

There is an upside down well within and there one finds the burning flame of life. . .

Gosvami Tulsidas Ji says:

While the world thought that the Sage Valmiki¹⁴ was reciting the name of Lord Ram backwards, he himself became like Brahman. Understand the power of Name. The great poet Valmiki became purified even by reciting Ram's name backward (by going inward).

The Inner Journey Involves Reversing the Consciousness Current

In the 20th century the great Sage Maharishi Mehi compared the ascending of consciousness to a fish swimming upstream. The mind must go inward, which is the reverse of its usual and easy outward path. Just as the fish struggles against the current, so an equal effort must be made to go against the current of the mind. By going inward against the current of the mind, one experiences the divine joy.



In the words of Sant Maharishi Mehi:

The stream of celestial nectar is flowing from the subtle canal of the sushumna nerve. Like a fish the consciousness current is moving upstream.¹⁵ Like a fish making its way upstream, the mind travels with consciousness away from the senses (the current) with great difficulty. (This will seem to the mind a difficult and “unnatural” course, as the mind is habituated to move toward the senses and the sensory objects.)

But how exactly this concentration of dispersed consciousness and reversing it inward is accomplished? It is accomplished by collecting your mind within with intense focus. To understand this, we must illustrate examples from the physical substances. Whenever a physical substance is gathered in one place, as it becomes concentrated, gathered in a pile, it moves upward, whether the substance is a solid, a liquid, or a gas. The more subtle substance is more pervasive, its movement is faster, and it is capable of moving higher: water is more subtle than ice, steam is more subtle than water, and electric current or lightning is even subtler than steam.

The mind is inconceivably more subtle and faster than even the speed of light. Physicists have told us that the speed of light is 186,000 miles per second. We can see light, but one does not see the mind due to the subtle nature of mind. This is something to ponder: How fast can the mind travel when it is collected and



concentrated instead of being spread and dispersed in the external world? Now consider that consciousness is even more subtle than the mind and permeates it just as radio waves travel through physical objects. When collected, consciousness has the unimaginable speed. This is how (with the immense energy) the soul is capable of reaching God.

The Methods for Returning to the Divine

Source

As butter permeates milk, so consciousness permeates the mind. When the mind becomes concentrated so does the current of consciousness which permeates the body and mind. Therefore, the sants have given instruction about the ways to withdraw and concentrate the mind within. Maharishi Mehi elaborates on this in the *Philosophy of Liberation*. The following references are particularly worth studying:

In whatever realm of this universe one lives, it is natural to get the support from the predominant element of that realm.¹⁶ Therefore, one who is dwelling in the physical realm will naturally take support from the material elements. It would be easier to utilize the sensory elements in the method to concentrate the mind.¹⁷ Therefore, to begin to concentrate the



mind, one should make use of *Mānas japa* (mental repetition of the spoken name of God), and *Mānas dhyāna* (focusing on a physical manifested form of God). God permeates all realms of nature and the entire universe. The saints, prophets, sages, all radiant and all benevolent beings are myriad physical manifestations of the Divine Powers on earth. Fixing the mind on one of their images (*Mānas dhyāna*; focus on a divine form) facilitates concentration of the mind and prepares it to enter into the inner subtle realms.

In order to enter into the subtle realms, one must take support of the subtle element. One must therefore practice taking support of the subtle (non-material) element. Subtle support is “the infinitesimal point”. This point is visualized in the middle of two eye-brows. The infinitesimal point is also known as the subtlest of the subtle forms of God. *Bindu* (point) is defined as an indivisible point. It is too minute to be drawn or indicated in any physical way. *Driṣṭi yoga*, the yoga of vision is an uninterrupted concentration on (literally “seeing”) on the infinitesimal point. *Driṣṭi* is the power of seeing. Single-pointedness (intense focus) is attained by sitting with closed eyes and practicing uniting the beams of vision of both eyes. The technique of how to gaze on a single infinitesimal point in the center and concentrating the mind on that point is taught by the



teacher. This is known as *Driṣṭi Yoga*. In this practice it is advised neither to focus forcefully nor manipulate the eyeballs in any manner. The saints teach specifics of this *yogic technique*. By this practice the inner divine vision is opened. This is beyond the sensory dimension of seeing.

When the state of one-pointedness (complete focus) of mind is attained, it is possible to listen to the divine inner sounds which arise from the juncture of the material and subtle realms. These celestial sounds are not audible to the sensory ears. When the subtle state (*sukhma*, non-material) is reached, it becomes possible to perceive the divine sounds of the subtle realm. This sound has the inherent quality of attracting the consciousness to its point of origin. Once that sound is perceived, consciousness is drawn to the sounds of each successive and ascending realm until consciousness reaches the soundless realm (*shabadatita*). This is the realm of God (a State of Transcendence and Bliss). To achieve this, service to and association with a Sat Guru, as well as his instruction and grace are essential. The practitioner must also be diligent in practice.

The path described above can be summarized in the following manner. The four practices are gross to subtle in an ascending order: *Mānas japa*, *Mānas dhyāna*, *Driṣṭi yoga*,



Nadanusandhana (Sound *yoga*), and the Soundless *yoga*. The practices of *Mānas japa* (*mantra*) and *Mānas dhyāna* are the worship of the physical, qualified (personal) form of God. (God is perceived in various manifestations of name and form in the gross realm). The practice of the meditation on the infinitesimally small point, *Drīṣṭi yoga*, is the worship of the subtle qualified form of God (where God perceived as the infinitesimal point). Concentration on the divine sounds, *nadas* (other than *Sār Śabad*, the Divine Sound of the beginning, Logos) is the worship of the qualified formless Divine. As this meditation finally leads to the meditation on the *Sār Śabad* (the Original Divine Sound). The meditation on this essential Sound, *Logos, Adi Shabda*, is the worship of the Unqualified-Formless (the transcendent Godhead). This meditation is the culmination of all forms of worship. But without completely mastering all these practices and treading the inward journey, it will be impossible to reach the Soundless state (the realization of the Impersonal form of the Divine). This is the Realm of God and the attainment of *mokṣa* (the state of liberation). Reaching this the aspirant experiences absolute peace and achieves the ultimate goal of human life.



Understanding the Twofold Nature of the Divine

What do the terms, *qualified* and *unqualified* mean when applied to God? The *Prashna Upanishad* states that in the beginning God created *prana*, that is, *Hiranyagarba*. This is also known as the *world egg* or primal matter, the germ from which the perishable beings are created.¹⁸ The Divine Essence (God) Itself is beyond any distinctions and is without qualities (*gunas*).¹⁹

The *gunas* (the three qualities) exist only in the *manifested* universe. The essential being of God is beyond any attributes.²⁰ God (*Brahman*), the Primal Being, is Unqualified (*Nirguna Brahman*). God as the Personal Being (*Saguna Brahman*) is qualified and has attributes. In the *Bhagavad-Gita* (15: 16-17),

Lord Krishna speaks about the Two-fold nature of the Reality:

There are two spirits (purushas; realities) in this world, the perishable (kshara) and the imperishable (akshara). All beings are the perishable; the unchanging is called the imperishable. But distinct in highest spirit, the Supreme Self (parmatma) thus called who penetrates the three worlds and sustains them).



The Highest Spirit (*parmatma*) is the most distinct from the two beings (*purushas*). *Prakriti* (Nature, Material substance) in its primal state is congruous. In this primal state, the *gunas* (*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*) stay in perfect balance. They represent three distinct actions: Creation, sustenance, and destruction. These three, the cosmic attributes or the *gunas* are represented by three manifestation of the Personal God (God with attributes): Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Sustainer, and Shiva the Destroyer.

Sant Kabir says,

*The infinite impersonal supreme God is like a tree.
The three Lords (Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva) are the
branches of that tree, and the leaves sprouting from
the branches are the world.*

Just as the three *gunas* arose from the Creator; and just as the world arose from the *gunas*; so from one absolute *Dharma* (the Absolute Truth; the Way), a sustaining principle which exists at the very basis of creation, there arose separate forms of religion (*dharma*), including Sanatana Dharma (Vedic),²¹ Judeo-Christian, and Islam. The various religions represent the branches of one Tree. These *dharmas*, though they may seem divergent in various external ways, are related in the same way as the leaves and branches of a tree which arise from and are nourished by the same source.



The Holy *Koran* sheds light on the ultimate unity of the Truth:
*In the beginning all people were of one community.
Later people created different convictions and paths”
(Koran 11.10). And “in the beginning people were on
one Path (Koran 2.2).*

In the known history of mankind, *Sanatana Dharma* is oldest of the major *dharmas*, followed by the other *dharmas*, for example, Judeo-Christian and Islam. Due to differences of geography, culture, and language, these religions appear to be different from one another, but in fact, they are branches of one tree. The belief in the unity of God is the great theme of the major religions.

The *Rig Veda*, an ancient text of *Sanatana Dharma*, declares:
Truth is one; sages speak of it in different ways.

The teachings of all *dharmas*, Vedic, Judeo-Christian, Islamic, Sikhism and other, as well as the words of the saints, great religious scholars and poets, all emphasize this fundamental oneness of Truth.

In the *Katha Upanishad* (5: 13) Yama explains this mystery to Nachiketas:

As the one air has entered the world and becomes varied in form corresponding to the shape of the form of every object, so the one Inner Soul of all things becomes varied according to whatever form, and also exists outside..



The Divine Essence permeates all beings yet transcends them. Shri Ram teaches this to Hanumanji in the *Muktikopnishad* (72):

Oh, son of the Wind! Without sound, without touch, without form, without taste, without smell, and without name or caste, as the destroyer of all misery—this form of mine you should meditate on always.

In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Lord Krishna also advises Arjuna to meditate upon his form beyond the perishable and imperishable, which is Absolute and One. The Holy *Koran* is also filled with references to the unity of God. And the Lord's Prayer, the most common prayer of Christianity, addresses God as *our* Father, the Father common to us all.²² The following quotes from different saints also reaffirm the oneness of God:

Sant Kabir Sahib says:

My great Lord is one; I dare not say two. If I say two, this pleases not my Lord.

Guru Nanak Dev says:

There is only one Lord, the great Lord. By seeing His unity one is blessed with all treasures.

Sant Dadudyal says:

I found the beginning and the end within [my heart] and now this mind does not go elsewhere. Now Dadu is colored in the color of the One and is absorbed in that One.



Sant Sundar Das sees the Divine present in every heart:

One God resides in the heart of each and every person. Why don't you meditate on that one God? That God helps you overcome misery. Why do you forget that Lord? Four kinds of wealth are with him, eight kinds of siddhis (supernormal powers), and nine kinds of treasure can be obtained from Him. People who pray to any other than this great God have mouths full of dust [wasting away lives], warns Sundar.

Gosvami Tulsidas says:

The One [Supreme Being] is unspoken, without form, without name, without birth, the abode of knowledge and bliss.

Sant Surdas says:

If the mind wants to find God, it should leave the outward trappings of texts and external worship. Abandon texts and ceremonies; and be truthful in thoughts, words, and deeds! Then one will see the true Lord within one's own self.

Unifying Principles in the Spiritual Path

Vedic dharma has its temples, Christianity its churches, and Islam its mosques. But the real temple is the heart. God is attained within: the path to God lies within one's own self, as all the saints have taught this with unanimity. The inner path begins in *Sushumana, ajana chakra* (the tenth gate between two eyebrows).



One Faqir has said:

O aspirant! Why are you wandering aimlessly outward (in the mosques, churches, and temples)? The path lies within, begins in sushumna, for meeting with the beloved (Lord.)

Furthermore, it is said

The deluded one does not understand that, although Mohammed is manifested and seen, Allah is unseen.

Sant Maharishi Mehi says:

Look for and search for God within yourself, within your own body. God resides in your heart—look for Him there. The white point shines straight ahead and twinkles. You must concentrate in sushumna by leaving the restlessness of the mind behind.

Where the subtle sounds vibrate in the ajna chakra, stay and make your dwelling. The door is subtle and sushumna is the point or window. With great effort, you can go through.

In Reference to the Inner Spiritual Practice

The inner spiritual practices of the major *dharmas* or religions, though seemingly diverse, have the same purpose and goal. *Japa* and *dhyāna* exist in some form in different religions. In Islam these are called *zikar* and *fikar*; in Christianity they are known as chanting and meditating. The beginning of *dhyāna* pertains to the physical form of the object of worship. The Sufis of Islam tradition meditate on the form of their spiritual teacher



(*murshid*). They become so absorbed that they even forget their physical existence. The similar experience is told in a story of the *Ramayana* where Sutikshna Muni became unaware of his body while meditating on Shri Ram.

The practices similar to *Driṣṭi yoga* and the *yoga* of Sound are also described in the Sufi tradition, where they are known as *saglenasira* and *sultanulajakar*. Through these practices the Sufi attains the divine states and ultimately merges in Allaha. Christian and Jewish mystics have also spoken of the same types of experiences in terms of the divine glory and celestial inner sounds.

The experience of Divine Light and Divine Sound are the arms of God which embrace the aspirant who practices them, as a child is embraced by the two arms of his father.

Lighting oil lamps in the temples, churches, and mosques, ringing bells, singing, praying out loud to extend our voice to God—these are all outer symbols of the inner experiences of divine light and sound.

Throughout this book, references to *Mānas japa*, *Manas*, *dhyāna* and *Driṣṭi sadhana and Nadanusandhan* (Sound *yoga*) are given.



In general, all sacred traditions have these four practices, usually with different names and different emphasis, perhaps, but still present. This progression of practices is a clearly marked path to God and is open to all—it does not discriminate among people of different races, religions, or sex (male or female).

The water of the ocean rises up in mist to form clouds. Then the clouds rain on the tops of the mountains, but the water cannot stand still there. It rolls down into small rivers, which merge with large rivers, and finally the water of the rivers makes its way back to the ocean. At this point in this cycle the water is no longer known distinctly as “river” because merging in the ocean it becomes the ocean. In the same way, the individual soul, having separated from God, wanders through 8,400,000 forms of life²³. Once the soul has received true instruction from a genuine teacher, and practices the four forms of meditation diligently, it finally realizes God and becomes one with Him. The cycle of birth and death then comes to an end.

Gosvami Tulsidas says:

As the water of a river merges with the ocean and becomes one with it, so the individual [in God] leaves the cycle of birth and death.

Santmat teaches and spreads this knowledge of how one can find and merge with God. This tradition is not based on any one



particular saint. Santmat is an ocean, a universal tradition. In the ocean many different rivers are merged. In the same way, the voices of all the saints become one voice.

Gosvami Tulsidas says,

Santmat is the unified way of all saints. It is devoid of discrimination and supported by the Vedas, Puranas, and sacred texts.

Caste and class do not exist in Santmat. In it Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jews, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Bahai's are all brothers and sisters. Santmat understands the world to be one family, and therefore, Santmat unifies and harmonizes all spiritual traditions. It is hoped that by reading this book, the reader will reach the conclusion: Within the various religious traditions of the world there exists the one essential Truth and similar essential practices. The various *dharmas* are in essence one *Dharma*, and the path for anyone who wishes to reach God is one.

¹ The Sanskrit word *dharma* means "sustaining principle." The word *dharma*, often translated as *religion* in this book, is used by Santsevi Ji throughout this work. *Dharma* has no one meaning in English. It means "sacred duty," "the principle or law that orders the universe," "Truth;" *dharma* is both the path and the Goal. Religion, considered as *dharma*, is the path (conduct and teachings) which puts one in conformity with the true—and usually unseen—reality. *Dharma* is what makes one fit to have a vision of the Ultimate Reality.

² "The *Laws of Manu*" is the English designation commonly applied to the *Manava Dharma-sastra*, a Sanskrit compendium of ancient sacred laws and



customs held in the highest reverence by the orthodox adherents of the Vedic *Dharma*.

³ Jainism was originated in India. The main doctrine of Jainism is non-violence.

⁴ “*Ahimsa satyamsteyam śouchamindriya nigraha.*” From the *Laws of Manu* (10/63)

⁵ *Laws of Manu*, 8/350 [Generally speaking, it is a heinous act to harm a guru and a brahmin, but in confronting evil Manu does not make any exceptions.]

⁶ *Mahabharata, Vana Parva*, 28.6.7

⁷ *Mahabharata, śhanti Parva*, 162/164

⁸ “*satyameva jayate nānratama.*”

⁹ “*sukshmāgatirīhi dharmasya*”

¹⁰ “Truth of *dharma* lies hidden in cave [of the heart]”

¹¹ The physical body is known as the city of nine gates, the seat of senses: We experience the material reality through the openings of two ears, two eyes, two nostrils, the mouth, and two excretion organs. The tenth gate, between the eyebrows, is invisible and is the gateway to the celestial realms.

¹² It is interesting to note that the mystical traditions of medieval Judaism, *Kabbalah*, are based on the metaphor of *Teshuvah*, the return.

¹³ *Vedic Dharma* or *Santana Dharma*, generally referred to as Hinduism is considered to be the most ancient of all religions. By definition it is timeless and has no beginning in history.

¹⁴ Sage Valmiki had been a criminal when he was approached by the great sage Vyasa. Vyasa asked Valmiki to repeat the name of *Ram* (a name of God). However, Valmiki was of a criminal mind and refused to speak God’s name. Vyasa therefore told him to repeat it backwards (MRA), which Valmiki agreed to do. Ram when recited backward becomes *Ram* again. Valmiki continued this repetition until he became radiant with spiritual power. He then wrote the great epic *Ramayana*.

¹⁵ The *sushumna* nectar spoken of here is the divine nectar which is experienced by going inward. The experience is one of intense bliss and happiness.

¹⁶ Shri Santsevi Ji uses the word “realm” to describe the various planes of existence. The gross realm is the everyday world that we live in; a subtler realm is called an astral world by the west. The heavenly regions would be yet another realm. These realms are experienced within in the states of deep meditation.

¹⁷ Gross element here refers to elements of the mind and its relation to the senses.

¹⁸ The *Bhagavad-Gita* with the Commentary of Sri Shankaracharya, p. 410.

¹⁹ From the inchoate state (*Hiranyagarbha*; golden egg; the womb of all manifested creation) emerged the three *gunas*, or qualities. [In traditional Hindu cosmology, there are three *gunas*: *sattva* (lucidity), *rajas* (active), and *tamas* (passive or dark inertia). On one hand, these *gunas* represent the principles of



physics, in that every material object, however fine, is the result of a certain combination and “crystallization” of these three qualities. On the other hand, the *gunas* are the language of metaphysics since these qualities are also principles of “activity,” that is, human states and principles of world creation can also be articulated by means of the *gunas*. Everything that results from the combination of these *gunas* is what is meant by the term “qualified.” That which is beyond the *gunas* is the unqualified. This is comprised of that which exists before the *gunas*, both in time and in priority.

²⁰ “The sun does not illuminate that (the eternal state of the Supreme Spirit), nor the moon nor fire. That is My supreme abode from which those who reach it never return” (The *Bhagavad-Gita* 15:6).

²¹ The essential Truth, Sanatana Dharma is the foundations of the religions born in India: Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism

²² The prayer Jesus spoke was modeled after the central prayer of ancient Judaism (the *Shema*): Hear! O Israel. The Lord Our God, the Lord is One. “*Adonai Eloheynu*” is Our God in Hebrew.

²³ According to certain texts of Hinduism the soul wanders through the cycle of thousands of life forms before attaining a human birth.



Chapter One

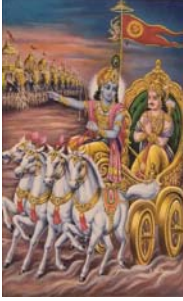
Vedic Tradition





Vedic Dharma

What is the *Veda*?



The inhabitants of ancient *Bharat* (India) were known as Aryans¹. Their sacred texts, commonly referred to as the *Vedas* are the oldest texts known to mankind.² The Sanskrit word *Veda* literally means knowledge. There are four collections of the hymns: *Rig Veda*, *Sama Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, and *Atharva Veda*.

These four collections are commonly referred to as the *Veda*.

Rig Veda is the foundation and the most ancient of the *Vedas*. *Atharva Veda* was incorporated at a later stage. The *mantras*³ (hymns) of the *Rig Veda* occur also in the *Yajur Veda* and the *Sama Veda* in connection with the various sacrifices. The *mantras* of the *Rig Veda* primarily consist of adoration and invocation to *devas* (gods) such as Agni, Mitra, Indra and Varuna and many others. According to the *Rig Veda* all the gods are manifestations of One ultimate Being or One Reality.⁴

There are four secondary texts known as the *Upvedas* (*up* prefix means subsidiary). These are of a later addition to the primary *Vedas* and are interrelated to each of the primary *Vedas*:



- *Rig Veda: Sthapatya Veda* (architecture and science of sociology)
- *Yajur Veda: Dhanur Veda* (military science)
- *Sama Veda: Gandharva Veda* (music and dance)
- *Atharva Veda: Ayurveda* (medicine)

The content of each of the Vedas comprises three categories:

- *Karmkanda* --Rituals
- *Upasanakanda*--Prayers
- *Jnanakanda*--Metaphysical discourses concerning the nature and realization of *Brahman* (the Ultimate Reality) and *Atman* (Inner Self)).

Of these three, the *Jnanakanda* consisting of discourses on spiritual knowledge is regarded as the highest. It contains profound discussions of absolute knowledge and experience. The *Vedas* are saturated with discussions of the knowledge and experience of *Brahman*, The Ultimate reality. The Vedas declare the ubiquitous nature of *Brahman*: “All is *Brahman*”; “There exists nothing but *Brahman*.”

Sage Manu says that “the *Vedas* are the foundation of all *dharmas* (Laws, Knowledge, Sacred Duty, Truth)”⁵ upon which the whole edifice of knowledge and art is built. The *Vedas* are



the storehouse of all knowledge and sciences; it is the infinite repository of learning. The *Vedas* are the source of all fundamental principles of Indian *dharma*, religion, philosophy, music, medicine and science. The knowledge expounded in the *Vedas* is limitless.

Since ancient times Saints, *Mahatmas* (greats souls), *Rishis* (seers), *Munis* (ascetics), and scholars of India have considered the *Vedas* to be eternal and of divine origin (*apaurusheya*, without a human source). It is believed that the origin of the *Vedas* came about in the form of knowledge revealed by God. Therefore, just as God, the *Vedas* are also without beginning, infinite and eternal. The *Upanishads* describe the *Vedas* as the *out-breath* of God.

Western scholars, however, date the *Vedas* at 5000 to 6000 B.C.E.⁶ These scholars argue that the *Vedas* have a beginning in time, they are, therefore, not of divine origin are not are not “timeless.” The main argument of these scholars is that the origin of the *Vedas* is best understood in the same way as the origin of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the ancient epics of India. Just as these epics are believed to be composed by sages, such as Valkmiki and Vyasa, so were the different branches of the *Vedas* composed by *Rishis* (seers) such as Katha



and others. Further, since there are specific composers of the various *Vedas*, therefore, they are not of divine origin. Thus, many scholars suggest that these *Vedas*, the sacred texts of ancient India, are of human origin, they are not eternal, and were composed at a certain point of time.

Jamini Rishi further sheds light on this issue. He states that although different branches of the *Vedas* are associated with the names of particular *rishis*,⁷ the *Vedas* were, in fact, not composed by them. The *rishis* were simply the expounders of this eternal *Wisdom*.

The *Jamini Sutra* 1/1/30 states:

*Those Rishis taught the composed mantra-samhitas (collections of the sacred hymns) which were not created by them.*⁸

Therefore, the *rishis* were actually seers of this knowledge of *mantras*. For this reason they were called the seers (*rishis*) not composers of *mantras*.

In the *Sarvanukarama Sutra*, *Katyayan* says:

*The rishis are the seers, who have memorized the revealed mantras. They are spokespersons of the mantras, not the composers.*⁹

Modern science claims that the sound waves of spoken words are not destroyed, but rather, are dispersed in the atmosphere. In the



future, it may be possible to retrieve all spoken words. Scientists theorize that radio waves which have been transmitted into the universe could possibly reverberate forever. This idea may provide a useful analogy for understanding the nature of spoken words as sound current.¹⁰ If, as modern science contends, sound waves are indestructible, perhaps it is also possible that the words which Lord Krishna spoke to Arjuna during the war chronicled in the *Mahabharata* still exist and it might even be possible to retrieve those words. The pundits of the *Vedas* claim that the sounds of the *Vedas* are always reverberating, are eternal, and therefore, not of human origin. Vedic scholars use this idea about the indestructibility of sound waves to support the idea that *shabad*¹¹ (sound) is indestructible.

It is, therefore, believed that the ancient *rishis* perceived the manifestations of the spiritual, eternal, and divine knowledge¹² through the divine intelligence they attained in the state of *samadhi* (state of union with the Divine). Later these mystical insights were rendered into the written text.

Sage Yaskacharya records in a hymn:

The seers saw the mantras and therefore, they are known as rishis. (Nirukta, 2/3/11)



Vedanta

The Sanskrit word *Vedanta* is made up of two words: ‘*Veda*’ which means “knowledge” and *anta* meaning “end.” Thus, *Vedanta* literally means the “end [goal] of knowledge.” But where does knowledge end? The wise have described four types of knowledge: Listening, thinking, intense repeated meditation, and experiencing. Thus the goal of knowledge culminates in experience.

The attainment of knowledge begins with listening (which includes studying). In ancient times, after listening, the students memorized the teachings. Therefore, the earlier name for the *Vedas* is *Shruti*, meaning that “which has been heard.” It is said that in later times people’s minds became feeble.¹³ Knowledge therefore became bound to the written texts, and these came to be known as the *Vedas*.¹⁴

As mentioned above, the *Vedas* are comprised of different sections. The earlier part is known as *Karmakanda* (rituals), which includes hymns for sacrificial rituals. The later sections of the *Vedas* are known as *Upasana* (meditation) and *Jananakanda* (knowledge of the Ultimate Reality). The later part primarily contains discourses on metaphysical issues and Wisdom. The



sections dealing with philosophical thought and wisdom are considered to be superior because they expound the ultimate goal of human life. Over the years, the metaphysical discourses on knowledge were distilled in the form of the *Upanishad*.¹⁵ The Sanskrit term, *Upanishad*, is made up of *upa* (near), *ni* (down) and *s(h)ad* (to sit), thus suggesting an image of sitting near the teacher to learn the subtle doctrines of self-realization. In earlier times these subtle teachings were referred to as the *Vedanta*, meaning the later part of the *Vedas*; and goal of the *Vedas*. As the ideas of the *Upanishads* continued to evolve into various philosophical treatises, they also came to be known as *Vedanta*. The *Upanishads* are, therefore, understood as “the end of the *Vedas*” as well as “the culmination of Knowledge” for several reasons, as follows:

1. The *Upanishads* are the final treatise of the Vedic literature. The first part of the *Vedas* is known as *Samhita*, a collection of Vedic hymns or *mantras*. Next are the *Brāhmanas*, which pertain to sacrificial rituals, and the *Aranyakas*, the Forest treatises. The last section of the *Vedas* is the *Upanishads*.
2. For the sake of a comprehensive knowledge of the *Vedas*, the followers of the Vedic Dharma usually begin with the *Samhita*, the study of *mantras*.



During the *grhastha* stage (householder), and for the purpose of performing sacrifice and ritual worship the *Brāhmanas* are utilized. During the next stages, *vanprastha* (forest dweller) and the *sanyasa* (stage of the renunciation) the study of *Aranyakas* (the forest teachings) is required. *Aranyakas* and *Sanyasis* have made the transition to a quiet life in the forest in order to seek the Ultimate truth through meditation and contemplation. Therefore these texts are known as *Aranayaks* and pertain to this stage of life. The *Aranayakas*—the forest treatises—evolved overtime and became developed into the form of the *Upanishads*. The *Upanishads* are the final treatises and also represent the crystallization of the metaphysical and spiritual thoughts of the *Vedas*. Therefore, the *Upanishads* considered to be the culmination of Vedic knowledge (*Vedanta*).

3. It is said in the *Chandogya Upanishad* (chapter 6 and 7):
Even with the study of the Vedas and its different sections, knowledge is incomplete without the study of the wisdom of the Upanishad.



The *Tettairya Upanishad* (1/1) also declares:

The Upanishads contain the subtle mystery of the Vedas, therefore they are known as Vedopanishads.”

The *Upanishads* contain an extensive analysis into the nature of *Atman* (Universal Soul), *Brahman* (Ultimate Reality) and the world. It is not incorrect to say that the *Upanishads* are certainly a treasure for seekers of spiritual knowledge. The famous German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer was deeply influenced by the *Upanishads*.

He writes:

There is no text other than the Upanishads which is greater in giving peace. The Upanishads are the solace of my life and solace to me in my death.

According to the *rishis* (sages), who are the spokespersons of *Vedanta* Wisdom, there is one Omnipresent Truth. This is the Reality out of which the entire creation is manifested and in which all creation is sustained. Through knowledge of this essential Truth, one can obtain immortality. This Truth is variously referred to as *Brahman* (Ultimate Reality), *Atman* (Self), and *Sat* (Truth).

The *Aitrayiya* (1/1/1) and the *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* (1/4/1) address this Reality as *Ataman*:

In the beginning there was only one Atman.



The *Chandogya Upanishad* (7/25/2) also says:

Whatever is here (in this creation) is indeed Atman.

The *Bṛhadaranayaka Upanishad* further says:

After knowing this Atman all is known.

The *Bṛhadaranyaka* declares:

This Atman is Brahman (2/5/19). And “*I am Brahman*”¹⁶ (1/4/10).

The *Chandogya* and *Mundaka Upanishads* also declare that to know *Atman* is to know all.¹⁷

The *Upanishads* arrive at the conclusion that the body, senses, mind and intellect, as well as the joys arising from them, are fleeting and ephemeral forms, not the essential experience of the nature of *Atman*. The Pure Conscious element of *Atman* is the foundation of all minor joys. *Atman* is not confined by the boundaries of sense objects. Rather, it is boundless and permeates all, and is omnipresent.

The Knowledge of *Atma* (Supreme Self)

Atma Jnana, the knowledge of *atman* (Self), is considered to be the highest knowledge (*para vidya*). All other forms of knowledge are of a lesser type and therefore are lower



knowledge (*apara vidya*). The way to Self Knowledge begins by restraining lust, anger, egotism, attachment, and other afflictions. The seeker then strives to attain the direct experience of *Atman* through the successive practices of listening (to sacred texts and discourses of sages), contemplating (on what has been studied), and meditating.

According to the *Upanishads*, the highest goal—immortality—cannot be achieved merely through ceremonial and sacrificial rites.

The *Mundako Upanishads* (1/2/7) states:

*Unsafe boats, however, are these rituals
and sacrifices (to go across the world sea of death and
birth) as described by eighteen (shastras) in which
are expressed these lower performances.
The ignorant who consider them better
Go time and again to old age and death.*

One can attain the joys of heaven for a limited time by means of sacrificial rituals (*yajnas*), but when the rewards of the rituals perish, the person must again return to this world of birth and death. By these lesser boats one cannot go beyond the world sea.¹⁸

According to the various *Shastras* (the sacred texts), *havan* (the sacrificial fire ritual), and the chanting of *mantras* are for people



who are ignorant of the essential Truth (*Atma-jnana*). The practice of *self-knowledge* (self-realization) is greater than sacrifices to the gods and goddesses. Only through knowledge of self can one eliminate the cycle of rebirth and the sufferings of taking birth. Only one who realizes unity with the infinite immortal *Brahman* shall attain immortality.

The *Katha Upanishad* (6/14) affirms:

When all the desires that lodge in one's heart are liberated, then a mortal becomes immortal; therein he reaches Brahman.

Direct Experience (Self-Realization)

Vedanta wisdom teaches us to reflect upon the knowledge we gain from listening to the discourses of saints and reading the sacred writings. After careful examination and discernment of the truth, we must incorporate that knowledge into our lives. With repeated practice of the knowledge, the practitioner becomes accustomed to it. When the practice is perfected, the aspirant gains the direct experience of the Divine Self.

We hear that the nature of *Atman* is imperishable, immortal, infinite and pure (without imperfection). We should then examine what we have heard. In order to have the direct experience of *Atman*, the intellectual understanding of the nature



of *Atman* must be followed by a meditation practice. This practice is an inner journey, called *nididhyasana* (meditating upon the essence of what has now been intellectually understood). Diligent spiritual discipline leads the aspirant to the direct experience of his true nature—*Atman*.

The Sanskrit word for experience, *anubhava*, is a compound: *Anu* (latter) and *bhava* (arising). Thus, experience is understood as that which arises after practice. Having attained this knowledge, nothing remains to be known.

Sant Sundar Das Ji Maharaj has elaborated on the four-fold path of knowledge: *listening, contemplating, meditating, and experiencing*.

He uses an illustration of the process of satisfying the appetite for food:

Talking about gourmet foods brings pleasure to the mind (Listening). However, until we have eaten this food there is no true delight. When all the ingredients are gathered for cooking and the food is being prepared, the mind begins to long for the taste (Thinking/Contemplating). Once the food has been prepared, one begins to put one bite in the mouth at a time, and then experiences each course of the meal. (nididhyasana; meditation).¹⁹ Each bite brings a feeling of satisfaction. . As we progress through the meal, we experience the joy of a satiated appetite.



Then as we become full, there is no more appetite (Experience). Says Sundar, the contentment is the experience of direct experience.

Through this illustration Sant Sundar Das Ji demonstrates the process of knowledge through the analogy of food. The feeling of contentment at the end of the meal corresponds to the stage of direct experience—a state of contentment.

If we think through this metaphorical example, we notice that the body is nourished and satisfied by eating food, but mere talk of food neither satisfies the appetite nor produces nourishment for the body. The appetite is satisfied from the labor of food preparation along with the gradual process of eating and digestion, and the resulting nourishment of the body and satisfaction of the mind.

In this same manner, through spiritual discipline, we can make progress toward attaining the experience of true knowledge. The first three stages are stepping stones to the final stage of divine experience. However, it must be kept in mind that the realm of the fourth stage is very extensive and requires a long journey.

As aspirants progress on the inner spiritual journey they experience the celestial scenes. The course of this journey involves contemplation and repeated meditation known *as*



nidhidhyasana. This process culminates in the absolute knowledge of the inner Self. Now there is nothing more to be attained. As long as we remain in the elementary stages of knowledge—listening, studying, contemplating and meditating—the goal is not yet accomplished. It is achieved only when the stages of knowledge culminate in the direct experience—*anubhava*. Thereafter, nothing remains to be accomplished.

Let us look at a simple anecdote that will add clarity: Once there was a gathering of philosophers from various schools of *Vedanta*: *Dvaita*, the dualist school; *Advaita*, the non-dualist school; *Vishishtadvaita*, the qualified dualists; and *Shudhadvaita*, the pure dualists. At this gathering, the representatives of each school presented their views in their discourses. The proponents of both the dualist and the non-dualist philosophies presented extraordinarily compelling arguments in favor of their convictions. Consequently, each was influenced by the convincing arguments of the other. As a result, the dualist philosopher converted to the non-dualist philosophical school, and the non-dualist to the dualist school. What is the essential lesson to be learned from this account? It is this: When the foundation of our knowledge is merely intellectual knowledge, from the early stages of listening and speculating, it is possible to



be swayed by the convincing arguments of another. However, when we have realized the nature of Truth through practice, and have experienced it directly, there is no question of wavering or changing our position since we have seen and experienced the Truth for ourselves. We have reached the stage of experience and the knowledge is beyond argument.

Vedanta explains the steps of knowledge metaphorically: the knowledge gained through listening can be compared to a household fire. The knowledge gained through analysis and speculation is analogous to lightning. And the knowledge of diligent meditation practice is like volcanic fire in the depths of the ocean. Just as a common fire can be extinguished by drops of rain, in the same way, a person's theoretical knowledge, gained simply by listening, can easily be confounded by persuasive arguments. But, the knowledge attained through analysis and contemplation becomes like the force of lightning, which cannot simply be extinguished by water. Even so, just as lightning by nature is unstable, so the knowledge gained through thoughtful speculation is still precarious. But the knowledge acquired through repeated meditation can be compared to an underwater volcanic fire which will not even be extinguished by the ocean of water surrounding it. Just so, knowledge gained



through meditation will not be vulnerable to the fluctuations of this world.

But even this knowledge has limitations, just as volcanic fire that is burning under the ocean. It is powerful yet it is not capable of drying up the whole ocean of water. In the same way *nidhidyasana* can not completely destroy the ocean or *maya* (the web of illusion of duality). However, during the course of repeated and dedicated practice, the seeker becomes proficient and attains the experience of an even deeper knowledge. Such knowledge is like an apocalyptic fire which devours the entire illusion of duality (*maya*). This is the reason that *Vedanta* cautions the student to not remain mired in the beginning stages of acquiring knowledge, through listening and intellectualizing, but to keep moving forward, through constant and consistent practice, until direct experience is attained.

Yoga and Dhyāna (Meditation)

In the *Bhagavad-Gita* Lord Krishna presents several definitions of Yoga,²⁰ such as “Yoga is skill in one’s own duty” and “Equanimity of mind is yoga.” Lord Krishna gave knowledge to Arjuna in the form of the *Gita*. The *Gita* contains various types



of yoga corresponding to its 18 chapters. In addition to these, several other types of *yogas* are mentioned.

Patanjali, the great Indian sage who lived around 300 B.C.E., systematized the various components of *Yoga*. He defined *yoga* as “uninterrupted thought on a single object.” Patanjali’s system, known as the eightfold path, is comprised of eight limbs: *Yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dhyāna*, *dharana*, and *Samadhi*. *Yama* (restraint, discipline) has these five components: truth, nonviolence, non-stealing, celibacy and non-possession. *Niyama* (observance) also has five components: purity, contentment, austerity of body and mind, self study (study and reflection on the scriptures and discourse of spiritual teachers), and faith in God. The practitioner will not be able to attain perfection in the third limb of *yoga*, *asana* (posture), until he or she has diligently practiced the moral principles of *yama* and *niyama*. The next (fourth) limb in this system is *pranayama* (breath control), which acts to purify the mind from distraction, making it easier for the practitioner to focus his mind. Thus, the path is sequential. If the practitioner first achieves proficiency in *asana*, and then performs *pranayama*, he/she will be able to become proficient in *pranayama*. However, yoga does not end here. [In the West, Yoga is, usually, only thought of as the practice of postures and breathing exercises that are utilized to



enhance physical and mental health. In the Indian traditions, yoga is a holistic spiritual discipline which culminates in divine union.]

The fifth limb of yoga is *pratyahara*, restraining of the mind (withdrawal of the senses). *Pratyahara* is followed by *dharana*—deep focus for short periods of time, which is then followed by *dhyāna*, state of concentration.

When we try to concentrate the mind in meditation and worship, we find it difficult to bring the mind to a focus. The mind wanders away. When we sit for prayer or for meditation, how long does the mind stay concentrated in this task? The mind continually moves. It wanders constantly. No one can even begin to count how many directions it may have gone during the meditation because the unstable mind runs hither and thither. We may lock our body up in a small meditation room but are we able to lock up the mind also? The mind roams from one place to another, from one country to another. Who can really even remember where has it wandered?

Sant Sundar Das Ji says:

*In one moment the mind can think of the immediacy of death, or the longevity of life,
In one moment it considers being sold out in someone's hand.*



In a moment the mind roams into the nine realms of the universe, desiring to look around the seen and unseen places.

This mind's trickery is ever elusive, but we have to deal with it.

No one can measure the speed of the mind.

Whoever attempts to fathom the nature of mind can only be a Mad.

Sant Paltu says:

Our mind is so swift that no other vehicle can compare to its speed: We cannot restrain the mind: it is ever strong and active. It is like a mighty combatant. Its nature is mischievous. Paltu says that the mind is capable of traveling thousands of miles in the blink of an eye.

Even today in our scientific world, no matter how many fast planes have been invented, they are nevertheless still slower than the speed of the mind. This swiftly moving mind is stubborn and difficult to control.

As Sant Kabir has said:

Dear practitioners! The mind is very mischievous and whoever has to deal with this mind knows its obstinate nature.

We consider ourselves well and sound. But when we sit for meditation and when the fire of meditation touches us, we see the blemishes surfacing in the mind. Sant Kabir says that



whosoever has tried to control this mind knows what a daunting task it is.

Therefore, Sant Kabir says:

The mind is like the monkey of the magician. If the monkey obeys the magician, then the two succeed in their entertainment feat, otherwise they cannot make a living (because their customers will flee).

The mind is like a monkey. When the magician and the monkey perform in unison, they entertain the spectators and the magician earns money to sustain their livelihood. If the monkey acts mischievously, begins biting or is rough with patrons, the monkey is beaten with a staff, and the magician will lose money in his magic show. In the same way our mind is likened to that monkey. Then how are we to control this mind? Until we can bring the mind to a focus and train it to follow the prescribed techniques, we cannot control and subjugate the mind.

During meditation we should not be defeated in the exercise of *pratyahara*, literally, “bringing back”—bringing the wandering mind back to a focus. What is the other meaning of *pratyahara*? *Prati* (every) and *ahara* (consume) are the two components of this word thus it means “consume everything.” Whatever thought arises consume that thought. If you don’t consume that thought, you will be consumed by it. Thus, the practice involves



consuming, or actively controlling, the rising tide of thought. During meditation the mind creates air castles beyond description. While sitting in one place the mind wanders everywhere, and we cannot even keep track of its ever swirling nature. Therefore, the saints instruct that first we must practice *pratyahara*. Just as we would sit down to eat and consume food, in the same way we should sit in meditation to consume the thoughts as they arise. We should consume such thoughts that very moment. No matter what images and fanciful ideas infest the mind during meditation, the saints insist we should consume them without any delay or hesitation.

If you are unable to practice constant vigilance of mind then when you sit down to do *japa* (recitation of a holy name) your mind will be involved in unnecessary gossip, solving problems, creating imaginary castles, and making long term plans. In this manner, your meditation time will be wasted with the roaming mind and remaining unfocused. Therefore, do not get defeated in the constant practice of *pratyahara*. If you give up in *pratyahara* you will not succeed in subduing the mind.

Keep this in mind and reflect upon it: The mind is unconscious [the mind-machine is powered by consciousness; it is considered



to be a sensory organ]. Yet we are immortal and eternal and the repository of joy.²¹

Gosvami Tulsidas says:

The individual soul is part of the eternal God and is the storehouse of consciousness and joy. But, it has been under the control of maya and is tied and bound to it as domesticated parrots and monkeys.

Now listen to Sant Kabir:

Oh brothers, I cannot understand this mystery. The tiger cub has been taken by the cat.

Who would believe that a tiger cub has been stolen by a cat and that cat is running with it? The individual soul (*jivatman*) like the tiger cub is inseparable from God and is beyond old age and death. It has come into the grip of *maya*, just like the cat.

Oh mind, you dance in all directions owing to the effects of maya. As the magician makes his monkey dance with the noose of his rope, so the noose of desires rules the mind. The monkey bows to everyone and forgets about his own nature. O humans! You do the same when you dance night and day for the desires of the flesh rather than for the divine name. Why do you dance perpetually, deluded by this maya (illusion which deludes the mind to run after desires)?

We must remember this: We are conscious and the mind is unconscious. The battle between consciousness and



unconsciousness continues [even when we try to meditate]. But eventually the unconscious mind will lose and consciousness will win. This is certain.

The Main Obstacles in the Practice of *Dhyāna*

The two main hindrances to success in the practice of meditation are as follows:

1. Procrastination and Laziness
2. The train of thoughts during meditation, such as day dreaming, fanciful imagination, and planning.

In addition, silence during meditation lulls many practitioners to sleep. During meditation we need to be vigilant and awake. Whatever the point of our focus is, we should diligently fix our mind on that goal. Then we will not be bothered by sleep. We can only reach our Noble (*arya*) destination within, the state of unity with God, if we overcome the enormous challenge of procrastination and also restrain the ever-rising tide of mental activity during meditation.²² Not so vigilant practitioners usually become engrossed in extraneous thoughts or fall asleep. These formidable passes must be crossed for success.



What is the glorious destination that we are striving for? When we close our eyes we see darkness within, it is the realm of ignorance. When the light dawns within you, then you see that you reside in noble regions. In darkness resides ignorance and in light resides knowledge. For example, as we are now sitting in light, we are able to see one another. However, if the electric power goes out, the ensuing total darkness would make us unable to see others. We would not even be aware of other people coming and going.

In this analogy, light signifies knowledge and darkness signifies ignorance. When we see darkness with our eyes closed we are in the realm of death and re-birth because we are not aware of our true nature. When we come out of the realm of darkness and enter into the realm of light, we will at the same time escape the web of death. If we remain in darkness it is not possible to be free from the cycle of birth and death. Only when we achieve the inner light—the divine light which represents the glory of the Divine—can we be liberated from the cycle of birth and death.

Sant Kabir says:

In each house (heart) the light shines. But we are blind [ignorant of that divine light of knowledge] so we cannot see it. If we keep looking we will find the light and will destroy the shackles of death.



Various Forms of *Dhyāna* (Concentration)

Without formless or subtle meditation, it is impossible to attain the inner light. You must first get yourself out of darkness. How can this be possible? *Pratyahara*—bringing the mind back—is followed by *dharana*, sustaining the focus of the mind for small periods. At first this will only be for a very short time. *Pratyahara* involves the repeated practice of bringing the wandering mind to a focus. Through diligent practice of *pratyahara* we become able to focus on the object of meditation for little stretches of time. This is *dharana*.

When *dharana* is continuous for extended periods, the state of *dhyāna* (complete focus) becomes possible. However, merely focusing on a physical form or name is not the only type of *dhyāna*. *Dhyana* is also emptiness of mind.

As it is said in the *Jnana Sankalni Tantra*:

Dhyāna, focus on only the physical forms, is not the only dhyāna. The focus of the empty mind is known (focus in empty mind) as dhyāna. By the grace of this [focus] meditation, one undoubtedly attains Moksha.

In essence, the mind when becomes empty of all thoughts is the state of *dhyāna*.



Once someone asked Sant Mira Bai, a female *bhakta* poet: “Our mind wanders far away during meditation, what kind of practice did you do that you were able to control your mind?”

Mira Bai replied:

Through my consciousness I traveled the skies and then my mind came under control and agreed to be still.

Let us ponder this subject. What vehicle did Mira Bai use to travel the skies? Was it an airplane, a helicopter or a rocket? Mira Bai’s journey was not in the outer world, but rather, it was within, in the inner realms. Her vehicles were divine light (*bindu*), and divine sound.

Sant Maharishi Mehi comments on the inner journey:

Bindu and sound will come and receive you as you meditate. Yes, they will take you on the ride to observe the celestial realms of divine light and sound.

Sound is the quality of the void²³ and through sound the mind comes under control.

Sant Kabir speaks about the meditation:

Until we accomplish the meditation of complete thoughtlessness (shunya, which means emptiness or void), the mind cannot be controlled completely.



It is essential to practice formless meditation (emptiness) in order to fully restrain the mind. Without this practice it will not be possible to stay in the realm of Pure Consciousness (*Atman*).

There are various sequential stages of *dhyāna* (meditation). First, there is the meditation of physical form, either of *Sat Guru* or any representation of the Divine. Next, there is meditation on the formless subtle form (*bindu*). The focus on *bindu* (infinitesimally small point) is followed by the meditation on sound. Finally there is meditation beyond any sound or form, the subtlest unqualified form of the Divine. These are the increasingly subtler stages of meditation. In this way we undertake sequential steps to accomplish complete focus leading to the Ultimate realization (*samadhi*).

When we sit and begin meditation we meditate on the physical form. Why? Just as a child begins writing with big letters and then gradually smaller and finer letters, we also accomplish the preliminary stages of mediation on the physical or material forms and sounds before we are able to proceed to the more subtle forms of meditation. Persistent practice brings success in the objective.



Some wise person has said:

By practicing intense focus diligently, even the dull mind shines and becomes sharp. Just as a rope when rubbed against a stone will eventually leave a mark even on the stone; so is the mind brought under control through repeated effort.

Lord Krishna says in the *Bhagavad-Gita*:

Oh Arjuna, this mind is controlled through constant practice and detachment to worldly desires (dispassion to worldly enjoyments).

More on the Essentials of *Dhyāna*

One should practice *dhyāna* and strive for maintaining the state of detachment as well. What is *dhyāna*? It is a state of ridding the mind of its constant mental deliberations and thereby attaining of tranquility.” *Dhyāna* is complete focus of the mind, allowing no other thoughts. The untrained mind desires the delights of sense objects, so it persuades the senses, and then the sense organs become active in pursuing those desires. Whatever the mind desires the sense organs follow the lead of the mind. Picture a smorgasbord of delicious dishes presented in a lavish manner. We see the various choices and then the mind observing all the various choices decides which of these dishes to eat. Next, the hand extends to take the food. The mind directs the body, telling it which of these delicacies to eat first. It does not direct the body or hand to take all of the twenty five treats at



once, but only the specific ones chosen by the mind. In this way the desires of the mind are satiated by the activity of the five sense organs and the physical organs.

In the *Katha Upanishad* Yama tells Nachiketa:
The master of the senses is the mind.

How can this mind be controlled? For this purpose *shama* (calmness; control of desires) and *dama* (control of senses; restraining the organs of perception) are employed. To control the senses, the practice of *dama* is required; and to control the mind *shama* is required.²⁴ Until one practices *shama* and *dama*, one cannot control the senses or the mind. The senses feed the information to the mind, and then, the mind becomes active. For example: Where our eyes are focused, so there will be our mind. As our eyes act, so the mind follows. When our eyes are not active, for example looking at an object or person, then our mind also stops. When we are reading a book we focus on what is written. But if we fall asleep while reading, then we no longer have a focus for the mind. Thus, when the eyes are open, the mind is active, but when the eyes are closed, we are no longer aware of what we were reading. After some time, when we awaken, our mind becomes active and we can return to reading again.



The Method of Meditation

In the 6th chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Lord Krishna describes a technique for meditation. Lord Krishna says:

Keeping your body, head, and neck erect, unmoving and still; stare over the front of your nose, without allowing the mind to look in any direction.

Lord Krishna is here explaining to Arjuna the art and technique of focused gazing. The meditation of focused seeing that is taught in the *Gita*, is called *samprekshya dhyāna*. It is known in Jainism as *preksha dhyāna*, the meditation of seeing (or *Dristi yoga*). The *Jabaladarshanopanishad* says: “Gaze by making your eyes focused, thereby fixing yourself in *samadhi*”. In the *Upanishads* this is described as *pashyen dhyāna*, focused gazing meditation, and in Buddhism it is called *vipashyana* (literally, “clear seeing,” or “see deeply”). These different traditions speak of this art of ‘focused gazing’ in various ways. But they all agree:

...this mysterious art of seeing is impossible to learn through reading of sacred texts only. Therefore, learn the technique of unlocking this mystery from an accomplished (saint) teacher.

If you attempt to practice this technique without the guidance of an accomplished guide there is a risk of incurring a detrimental result. Instead of benefit one could even be harmed. [Sometimes



incorrect techniques of focusing may even cause damage to the eyeballs].

Saints and sages have unveiled all the mysteries of the spiritual journey and of self-realization in their discourses. All these techniques have been documented in different books. But without an accomplished teacher, we will not be able to grasp the correct technique of true knowledge.

In the *Bhagavad-Gita* Lord Krishna advises that for learning spiritual knowledge we must seek help from an accomplished seer [either male or female]:

For learning spiritual knowledge you should go to the one who is a seer. Pay your respect to him, serve him and question him and express your desire for learning. Then he will fulfill your desire and answer your questions.

Consider for a moment the nature of the knowledge you wish to learn. After high school, students think about the direction and choose a field of study: liberal arts, commerce, or science. If, for example, students want to learn liberal arts but go to a professor of science instead, will this teacher have much to offer? The students must choose a professor proficient in the knowledge they wish to learn. In the same manner, if you want to acquire



spiritual knowledge, you must go to a spiritually competent teacher.

The appropriate spiritual teacher should be a person who has considered and discovered the realities of *atma* and *anatma*; bondage and liberation, and who practices a spiritual path. Such a teacher must have attained direct experience of Truth through spiritual disciplines. This is the only kind of teacher you should take instruction from. The grace of the teacher is also necessary for success in the spiritual pursuit. When you have learned the methods for inner meditation, you should practice diligently. Moral rectitude is also quite essential in this spiritual pursuit.

This is the seventh limb of yoga, *dhyāna* (meditation; focus). When one has become completely established in *dhyāna* then one attains *Samadhi* (union).

Samadhi: (The State of Divine Union)

*Samadhi*²⁵ is the eighth limb of Yoga. *Samadhi* is of two kinds: One type of *Samadhi* is *samprajanata*—a joyful state in which higher consciousness working through the mind in all stages. The second type is *asamprajanata*. In this type of *samadhi* the mind is completely absorbed in a state of pure awareness and all of one's desires vanish. Generally speaking, the state of *Samadhi*



is achieved when the subject (soul) and the object (God) unite. Duality disappears, and oneness is established. According to the Sant tradition, this state is possible through the practice of the yoga of Divine Sound. Without the practice of Sound yoga, the practitioner will not be able to achieve complete control of the mind.

Sant Kabir speaks about the Divine Sound:

Search the Divine Sound, control your mind. This yoga is accomplished through the means of sound. The true sound is the essence of creation. The physical body and world are not real (i.e., not permanent).

Through the practice of the yoga of light, complete control of the senses is attained (*dama*), and through the yoga of sound the complete control of the mind (*shama*) is accomplished.

Today various types of techniques are taught in the name of the Yoga of Sound. It is uncertain if all of these systems are valid. Some systems instruct the practitioner to close the ears and press them with the hands to hear the murmur of the ears, while others recommend lying down on the ground to listen to the sounds under the earth. Each of these systems calls itself *nadanusandhana*—the yoga of sound. Still some other teachers play beautiful music and recommend becoming absorbed in that music signifying it as the practice of sound. However, none of



these techniques represent the authentic path of the Divine yoga of sound.

With regard to Sound yoga the *Yogshikhopanishad* says:

When one focuses on a finest point and becomes established in this focus, then the divine sound automatically becomes manifest and one is able to perform sound yoga.

At that point of focus our ten senses (cognitive senses and active expressions) are left behind, and we enter in a state of total absorption. When our eleventh sense, the mind, enters into the *ajna- charka* (the third eye) the practitioner is hears the celestial sounds. Vedic seers refer to this *ajna-chakra* as *sushumna* and fakirs of Sufi tradition call it *shahrag*.

Sant Tulsi Sahib says:

The path to reach our Beloved lies in shahrag. Why are you wandering in the outer world to find your beloved (God)?

The path leading to God is within your heart. Enter into *ajna-chakra* and you will find your beloved. God is not found not in a manmade *Ka'ba* (Muslim pilgrimage place), but in natural *Ka'ba* (holy place), within your own heart or self. Turn your attention within. You should listen attentively to the reverberating divine sound. The celestial sound is coming to take you back to the source. Remember you cannot hear this



with the physical ears. When you focus your gaze within *ajna chakra* and the consciousness is inverted inward your physical ears automatically will close and the inner ears will open. By that power with inner ears you can hear the celestial sounds. The original sound of the creation comes from the abode of God and it will take you to God.

The *Nadabindu Upanishad* sings the praise of Sound yoga and offers this image:

When a mad (in rut) elephant goes to a banana orchard and destroys and eats the orchard, and the elephant keeper comes and pierces the elephant with a prong, the elephant is brought under control. In the same manner, our mind is like the mad elephant that is wandering in the garden of sense objects and is disciplined by the practice of sound yoga.

This teaches us that when the mind withdraws from the sense objects and goes towards a state that is beyond worldly desires, the mind automatically turns toward God.

Sant Maharishi Mehi says:

Ascending from one sound center to another sound center we reach the OM sound (original sound of the universe). Through this practice we go beyond the cycle of death and birth. When one practices listening to the original sound (OM) then the soul and God become one and unity is established.



Sant Tulsidas also explains with an analogy:

The water of a river that has reached the ocean becomes one with the ocean and no longer has an identity of a river. The river has become part of the ocean.

Just as the water of the river find peace in union with the ocean, in the same manner when the soul unites with God, duality disappears, and the soul becomes tranquil. River is no longer a river it becomes ocean. When the soul (*atman*) is united with the One or God (*Brahman*) it is no longer an individual soul (*Jivatma*), but it is the Supreme Soul (*Paramatma*). This is the highest state of achievement and bliss: the state of complete unity of the Soul and God.

¹ The word *Aryans* is translated as “Noble Ones.”

² This is also the opinion of Shri Maharishi Mehi as expressed by him in the introduction to his book, the *Veda Darśan Yoga*.

³ *Mantra* is a hymn or sacred formula which is used to invoke the presence of various gods in the course of Vedic sacrifices and rituals. The hymns seek contentment, courage, devotion, energy, fearlessness, forgiveness, mercy, good life, happiness, health, intellect, long life, peace, progeny, purification, righteousness, success, victory, wealth, and wisdom.

⁴ “Truth (Reality) is one; the sages speak of it in various ways” is the famous axiom of the *Rig Veda*.

⁵ The Laws of Manu, 2/3

⁶ It is an earliest date assigned to the origins of the Vedas. However, a commonly found consensus dates the Vedas ca. 1500BCE.

⁷ The word *rishi* means a Seer, from *dris*, to see. He is the *Mantra-Drashta*, seer of Mantra or thought. The Rishis experienced the Truth and heard it. Therefore the Vedas are what are heard (*Sruti*). The *Rishis* did not compose them. They were the seers of thought which existed already. The *Rishis* are the discoverers not the inventors of the Vedas.



⁸ “*Akhyā Pravchanat*” (The Jamini Sutra, 1/1/30)

⁹ “*Drishtar rishaya smratarh*,” from the *Sarvanukrama Sutra*

¹⁰ Certainly on the subtle level the thought behind the expressed word can be considered as continuing to reverberate indefinitely.

¹¹ *Shabad* means gross sound as well as subtle sound. The subtle form of sound is considered the basis of creation.

¹² Swami Sivanada elaborates, “The Vedas form the sound-manifestation of Ishvara. That sound has four divisions,— *Para* which finds manifestation only in *Prana*, *Pasyanti* which finds manifestation in the mind, *Madhyama* which finds manifestation in the *Indriyas*, and *Vaikhari* which finds manifestation in articulate expression..” From *Kundalini Yoga*

¹³ In Indian thought, time is composed of cycles, called *Yugas*. In each successive *Yuga* the people decline intellectually, morally and spiritually. Hence it is thought that people of later cycles have less mental capacity.

¹⁴ The word *Veda* is derived from the root verb *vid* meaning to know.

¹⁵ *Upanishad* means the inner or mystic teaching. Groups of pupils sat near the teacher to learn the subtle doctrine of self-realization.

¹⁶ “*Ayam Atma Brahma*” and “*Ahambrhamasmi*” are the celebrated sayings of the *Upanishads*

¹⁷ The knowledge of Atman brings the understanding of the unity of *Atman* and *Brahman: Taittvamasi*.

¹⁸ Gosvami Tulsi Das says in the *Ramachariatmanasa*: “The pleasures of heaven are short lived. Having exhausted the results of meritorious acts one is bound to fall below in lower worlds.”

¹⁹ In this analogy, before the complete satisfaction of the final experience, the process is known as *nidhidhyasana*.

²⁰ The Sanskrit word *yoga* is derived from the root verb ‘*yuj*’ meaning to ‘yoke’ or to ‘unite’. The goal of Yogic practices is to lead the human soul toward Divine Union.

²¹ The mind in the *Vedanta* texts is considered to be a sense organ which is powered by consciousness.

²² As *Aryans* (literally, noble ones) crossed many steep mountains such as Khybar and Bolan to enter the Spiritual land of India in the same manner we must cross the steep mountains of procrastination and restless mind to enter the inner spiritual states.

²³ The Five Elements: The five gross elements (*bhutas*) constitute the material world as well as the five senses. Earth possesses the property of smell and constitutes the corresponding sense, the nose. Water possesses the property of taste and constitutes the sense of taste. Fire possesses colors and constitutes the



sense of vision. To Air are due the qualities and sense of touch and the qualities of touch. To Ether are due the sense of hearing, the ear and sounds.

In physics, Ether is defined as an all-pervasive, infinitely elastic, massless medium formerly postulated as the medium of propagation of electromagnetic waves.

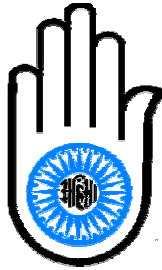
²⁴ The practices of *shama* and *dama* are not meant for self-affliction, but rather, for cultivating a discriminative intellect. The mind does not control our life as a master—drifting from one desire to another. But we take control our life and lead it to the ultimate realization.

²⁵ Mircea Eliade explains the terminology: "The meanings of the term *Samadhi* are union, totality; absorption in, complete concentration of mind; conjunction." (*Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*)

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Chapter Two

Jainism





Lord Mahavira and the Jain Tradition



The word “jain” is derived from the root word *jina* meaning “conqueror.” A *Jina* is one who has conquered the desires of the senses and overcome ignorance, thus attaining *Samyak Jnana*, Right (Absolute) Knowledge. The followers of this *dharma* (spiritual path) are known as Jains. The original impetus for this tradition came as a reaction to the violence in the form of animal sacrifices condoned in the *Vedas*. A seed of resistance began to germinate and from this seed Jain *dharma* developed.

Although specific details of the origin of Jainism are not known, but ancient tablets discovered at archeological sites in Udayagiri and Junaghara in India indicate that Jainism preceded Buddhism.

The honorable teachers of Jain *dharma* are known as *Tirthankaras*. They are considered to be free from of all impurities, liberated, and granters of freedom (absolute freedom). The meaning of *tirtha* is “to ferry one across the ocean of the world.” The one who has crossed this worldly ocean is known as a *tirthankara*. “*Tirthakaroti iti tirthankara*” means



“one who has crossed over and helps others cross the world-ocean is *tirthankara*.”¹

According to Jain *Dharma*, there have been twenty-four *Tirthankaras*—enlightened spiritual teachers—who have shown the way to Liberation. Rishabhadeva was the first *Tirthankara* of Jain *dharma*. After Rishabhadeva there were twenty three more *Tirthankaras*. Lord Mahavira was the last in the line. The names of the twenty four *Tirthankaras* of Jainism are as follows:

1) Rishabhadeva 2) Ajita 3) Sambhava 4) Abhinandana 5) Sumati 6) Padamprbhu 7) Suparshva 8) Chandraprabha 9) Pushpadanta 10) Sheetla 11) Shreyansa 12) Vasupujya 13) Vibhata 14) Ananta 15) Dharma 16) Shanti 17) Kunthu 18) Ara 19) Mallinatha 20) Muni Suvrata 21) Nami 22) Nemi 23) Parshvanatha 24) Vardhamana Mahavira.

In the present discussion we will only focus on the first and last of these *Tirthankaras*.

Rishabhadeva

The first *Tirthankara* Rishabhadeva was the son of King Nabhiraya, the fourteenth king among the generations of the



kings of the city of Ayodhya (in North East India). After the passing of King Nabhiraya, Rishabhadeva was crowned as king. Rishabhadeva fathered several progeny from his two queens.

One day, King Rishbadeva was seated on his magnificent throne, surrounded by hundreds of guest kings. From his throne he was enjoying the beautiful dance of a glamorous woman named Nilanjana. As the celestial performer was dancing and entertaining the kings, she suddenly fainted and died.

With her fall and sudden death, King Rishabhadeva was faced with the reality of the ephemeral nature of this transient world. His appetite for enjoyment and attachment faded and he became dyed with the color of detachment and dispassion. In spite of the attempts of his family and friends to dissuade him, he abandoned his crown and left his home in search of Self- Knowledge (*atma Jnana*).

King Rishabhadeva became an ascetic. He sat in meditation with complete absorption for six months. It is said that he later maintained silence for 1000 years, remaining immersed in the inner practice of meditation for the whole time. Through his practice of this deep state of meditation he attained the state of *Kevali Jnana* (Highest Knowledge).



Lord Mahavira

Although Lord Mahavira is the 24th (and the last) *Tirthankara* in the line, he holds the most eminent status in Jain *Dharma*. In fact, it was Lord Mahavira who gathered and organized the various elements of Jain *Dharma* and expounded them.

Mahavira was born about 2500 years ago (ca 599 B.C.E.) in Vaishali Republic (Bihar), in an aristocratic *Kshatriya*² clan. His father's name was Siddhartha. After his birth, wealth and opulence began to increase in the household. His parents attributed this sudden good luck to the baby, who was therefore named Vardhamana (ever increasing, prosperous). From early childhood he was extremely handsome and was endowed with immense intelligence and fortitude. Therefore, he became known as Mahavira, "the Great Hero." Mahavira's father was chief of the *Jnatrika* clan, which is reflected in his later epithets *Nata Putta* (scion of *Jnatr* family).³ When Mahavira attained self realization he came to be known as *Sanmati* (One who possesses extraordinary wisdom). In this way, Vardhamana has come to have many honorary titles.

After mastering various arts and skills suitable to a young man of the *Kshatriya* caste, Prince Vardhamana obeyed the wishes of his



parents and married a beautiful princess named Yashoda. As was the custom, the marriage was performed according to the wishes and arrangement of the parents. In due time, Mahavira and his wife Yashoda had one lovely daughter, named Priya Dharshana.⁴ Nevertheless, the comforts of luxurious living and the joys of a truly loving family failed to satisfy Mahavira. His heart was not inclined towards the life of a house-holder. It always felt constraining like the web of *maya*.⁵ His inner soul ceaselessly yearned for liberation.

Two years after the death of his parents at the age of 30, Mahavira renounced the worldly pleasures, left his family, and abandoned his householder status for the life of an ascetic. He then received spiritual initiation and became a forest dweller. Living in caves among the hills, he began the practice of *atma sadhana* (inner meditation). Whenever he became near to starvation he would enter the city to beg for food. In this way, he practiced intense inner and outer austerities for twelve years.

Once someone recognized Mahavira in his mendicant form in the forest, and offered him an arrangement for his personal security. To this Mahavira replied:

Arrange security for what? I have chosen the path of equanimity and non-violence. Who, therefore, is going



to protect me? I am not of the body. I am established in the Self.

During this time of his austerities Mahavira had to endure great afflictions, including snakes, scorpions and wild beasts pestering and threatening his life. There were also natural phenomena in the form of dust storms, heat, and vicious heat waves, which might have deterred him from his inner path of meditation. However, Mahavira, “the great hero,” remained resolute and unmoved.

At the age of 42, Mahavira attained the state of complete dispassion, defeating the foes of attachments, selfish desires, and hatred. Thus, he then became a true *Mahavira*, or great conqueror. He attained the divine power of omniscience and became known as *Bhagawan* (Lord). He achieved enlightenment (*Kevali Jnana*) and he became *Tirthankara*, a bridge builder to the shore of absolute freedom. He was honored with the name, Bhagavan Mahavira.

Lord Mahavira: His Teachings

Thereupon, Lord Mahavira began his journey to spread the essential teachings of Jain tradition. He rejected the superiority of the higher castes which were only based on birth. Therefore,



he completely disregarded the caste system. He considered the thoughts and actions of a man to be the true measure of excellence not the high caste or class. He revolted against the established religious observances and rituals, and sought to restrain religious dogma and squandering of monetary resources.

Lord Mahavira never tried to coerce others to follow Jain doctrines and practices. His ideas were novel and attitude was progressive.

He invited people for active engagement in religious pursuit:

Whatever I say, you must test this with your own reasoning and verify it through your own experience. Do not accept what I say blindly by faith alone until it passes the litmus test of intellection. Otherwise, it will never be yours. If you accept what I teach on the basis of the sacred texts, or from my convincing reasoning, or even because of my radiant personality, but not by testing with your own reasoning, then in the end this will create only darkness (ignorance) in you and not light.

Mahavira's teaching about the Law of *Karma* was similar to the other saints of Indian traditions. He taught that each person's own *karmas* or past deeds are the cause of each individual soul's present condition. Life and death, joy and sorrow, are all caused by one's past deeds or *karmas*. He said that it is foolish to consider other persons as the cause of our joy, sorrow, life and death. When it is understood that living beings suffer due to the



consequences of their own past errors, then it will be understood that it is only through counteracting one's own errors and realizing one's own mistakes that a person can become happy.

The central point of Mahavira's teaching is about the liberation of the soul (*atma*). Primarily, Jainism is the path of freedom. Lord Mahavira elaborated *anuvrata* (a moral code of conduct) and emphasized the absolute importance of the development of human character:

You are god⁶ (Ishbara). Recognize yourself. Develop the inner divine qualities and become God. If the soul labors in the right direction, then that soul can become God (parama atma).

Lord Mahavira's Teachings on *Atma* and Meditation

Here are some references to *atman* and meditation as taught by Mahavira:

Atman is Brahma (the Ultimate Reality). Brahmacharya (living in Brahma; restraint of the senses)⁷ is the state of being established in one's soul. The practitioner who is freed from the body (who is detached from bodily desires) and established in the soul is the true brahmachari.

Through meditation of the soul Param Samadhi (highest state of concentration; state of liberation) is attained.



Absorbed in meditation the mendicant leaves behind all impurities. Therefore, meditation is the cure for all the impurities and afflictions of the soul.

If your vision itself becomes the source of removing darkness, then why would a man need an outside source of light? [By the practice of meditation the divine light dawns and the practitioner's divine vision opens up]. If the soul itself is an abode of infinite joy, why then would the sensual pleasures have any value for that practitioner?

In the above quote Lord Mahavira describes the divine vision which removes the darkness of ignorance. His words find support in an ancient anecdote about Mragavati, a devout woman and devoted wife, who was endowed with the divine vision and was able to see clearly in the darkness.

The bright *bindu* point (infinitesimal point) emerges when the practitioner becomes established in the discipline of focusing on one point with the beams of both eyes. When the inner light is attained, a practitioner is established in the divine light, which is not conditioned by any outward source of light. This technique is known by different names in texts of the various saints and traditions.⁸ In this practice of light the practitioner sitting in meditation is able to observe the scenes from anywhere (clairvoyance).⁹ The outward darkness does not hinder the



power and ability of seeing. Therefore, Mahavira has asked why the practitioner would need outward light once his vision has itself become the source (instrument) of removing darkness.

Once established in light, the practitioner hears various types of sweet inner melodious sounds. The saints have named this sound the *Anahad* (Un-struck, self producing divine sound). Through the technique of *Shabad* Yoga (Yoga of Divine Sound) the practitioner goes beyond these sounds and enters the eternal sound—*Pranava dhvani OM* (the cosmic sound of OM),. Through this the practitioner reaches God (*paramatma*—the Supreme Spirit) and reaches the point where the distinction between the devotee (practitioner) and God (object of worship) disappears. The soul which is united with the Supreme Soul, becomes the Supreme Soul. This state is known as *moksha*, *nirvana*, or *mukti* (Absolute Freedom). A discussion on *Shabad Yoga* is found in the text, *Jnanarnva* composed by Shrishubhachandracharya:

This dhyana (intense concentration) moves from one sound to another, and from one yoga to another. Therefore, it is known as that which is endowed with focus and logic.

Lord Mahavira speaks of the experience of the *Bindu—point*—in meditation as the experience of *sva* (inner self). Dr. Hukumchand Bharill in his book, *Tirthankara Mahavira and his*



*Sarvodaya Tirtha*¹⁰ has wonderfully depicted the inner depth of the meditation practice of Lord Mahavira. From these illustrations it is evident that Lord Mahavira practiced inner sound yoga or (*Shabad Yoga*)¹¹.

In the Jain texts we find various references:

[In the deep state of meditation] Lord Mahavira experienced the divine sounds. The sound of OM was ceaselessly emanating, the inner form of atman manifested in its utmost grandeur, and the nectar was pouring.

Lord Mahavira knew that is impossible to attain liberation and well-being of the self without morality and observance of discipline. Thus he declared:

Restraint (Sheela, life of moral rectitude) is the ladder to liberation.

Lord Mahavira stressed purity of life and the practice of moral behavior. He emphasized these five principles: *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truth), *achorya* (non-stealing), *brahmacharya* (restraint in sexual misconduct), and *aparigraha* (non-possession, lack of greed, or being satisfied with one's possessions). In order to apply these principles in daily life, he taught the monks and nuns the *mahavrata* (great vows), and laymen and laywomen the *anuvrata* (lesser vows).¹² It is



absolutely necessary the seekers to be free of sensual pleasures.

He states:

Sound, form, smell, taste and touch are sensual substances which are transient. Therefore, the practitioner should not be attached or attracted to the sensual pleasures.

Until the last moments of his life Mahavira inspired many to seek world peace through the attainment of inner peace, and he encouraged people to realize their divine nature. For 30 years he traveled throughout India to spread his message. At the age of 72, on the day of *Diwali* (the festival of lights) in the town of Pawa Puri, Mahavira ended his worldly journey. In the state of deep meditation he attained *nirvana*. His closest and chief disciple's name was Indrabhutti or Gautama.

The Branches of Jainism:

Shvetambara (White-Clad) and Digambara (Sky-Clad)

In the early stage of his renunciation, Mahavira wore white clothing. However, during long periods of intense meditation his clothes eventually deteriorated. Many centuries later, Jain *dharma* became divided into two sects. The first group wore white clothing and came to be known as *Shvetambaras* (white-



clad). The other group rejected clothing in order to emulate Mahavira's asceticism, and they came to be known as *Digambaras* (sky -clad).

The major texts of the *Shvetambara* sect are known as *angas* (limbs). These

1. *Acgaranga*: addresses the conduct of monks and the penance of Lord Mahavira.
2. *Sutra-Kritang*: describes the principle of nonviolence and the Jain concept of the universe.
3. *Sthaanang*: discusses the basic substances of the universe, such as living beings, *Jeevas*.
4. *Samvayang*: provides the comprehensive knowledge of the universal constituents and concepts in the light of substance (matter), environment, time, and experience.
5. *Bhagvati Sutta*: contains questions and answers about the soul, matter and other related subjects.
6. *Jnatadharmakatha*: contains stories, illustrating the principles and teachings of the Jain religion.



7. *Upaska Dashang*: describes the code of conduct of Jain householders, along with the stories of ten householders who religiously followed Lord Mahavira's teachings.

8. *Antahkrit Dashang*: contains the stories of ten monks who became omniscient and attained salvation by destroying their *karma*.

9. *Anuttaropadik*: describes the lives of ten monks who attained the status of heavenly beings.

10. *Prashna-vyakarnananga*: contains questions, answers and stories regarding the five major vows and demerits.

11. *Vipaka-shrutang*: illustrates stories that explain the consequences of good and bad *karma*.

12. *Drišti -vadang*: consists of five segments.¹³

These texts are written in the *Ardhmagadhi* language and are believed to be more than two thousand years old.

The *Digambra* sect does not entirely subscribe to these texts. It has a separate canon in Sanskrit in which the parables and legends of Lord Mahavira and other *Tirthankaras* are depicted. These texts, known as *Puranas*,



are 24 in number. Nevertheless, there are no significant doctrinal differences between the two groups of Jain Dharma.

The Method of *Sadhana* (Meditation Practice)

Jain *dharma* is based on the following three principles *Samyagdarshan* (Right Belief, View), *Samyagjnana* (Right Knowledge), and *Samyagchartira* (Right Conduct). These are known as *ratna traya* or “three gems.”

These three in unison constitute the path to liberation.

Determining the true nature of self (atman) is “Right view;” knowledge of the nature of the soul is “Right knowledge;” and immersing in the true nature of the soul (divine spirit) is “Right Conduct.”
(*Purusharthsidhopaya, shloka 216*)

In their discourses on inner meditation, the saints (enlightened beings) describe two specific techniques: Divine light and Divine sound. However, these techniques are not always clearly explained and often there are only covert references to these methods are mentioned. Light and sound are said to be the energy [facets] and eternal form of *Paramatma* (the Supreme Spirit). The Saint tradition usually describes two sequential techniques used to experience the divine nature. The first of



these is *Bindu Dhyana (preksha dhyāna)*. This is the technique of focused seeing, the yoga of Light. The second technique is *Surat Śabda Yoga*. It is method to focus on inner sounds; the yoga of Sound. We have briefly presented these techniques above.

Many of the saints discuss the need for *mantra japa* (recitation of a divine name) and meditation on a sacred form as preparatory practices for *Bindu Dhyana* and *Surat Śabda Yoga*. These disciplines enable the practitioner to have success with the subtler forms of meditation.

Here we present some references from Jain scholars which describe the essential beliefs and practices of Jain *dharma*. These readings will facilitate the reader's understanding of the unique and essential forms of Jainism.

Mantra Japa

Acharya Tulsi speaks about *mantra japa* in his book, *An Outline of the Science of Life*:

We have only one consciousness stream. When we associate with truth, we ascend upwards and when we associate with untruth we fall down. The japa mantra method was developed to control the mind so that it would be stabilized and would be prevented from wandering into wrong thinking.



Other great teachers of Jainism have expressed their thoughts about *mantra japa*. For Example:

Mahamasvi Shri Jinendravarni says:

The easiest form of meditation in dharma is mantra japa. It is very significant for spiritual progress. The practitioner may choose, according to his or her interest and faith, any mantra, such as an arhant (the enlightened one), siddha (the accomplished one) or omkar, etc. (divine sound, OM).

Shubhchandracharya says:

Arhant is the mantra of four letters. Therefore, it bestows accordingly four desired fruits of life: dharma (Lawful conduct; ethical conduct), artha (wealth), kama (worldly desires), and moksha (liberation).

Mānas Dhyāna

With regard to *mānas dhyāna* Shubhchandracharya says:

In the meditation of mānas dhyana, the practitioner should meditate on the physical form of arhant (divinity). The Arhant is endowed with great eminence and is a self-existing being in the midst of omniscience, Lord, and effulgent light of sun and moon. (Jnanarnva—sarga 39, shloka 1)

One should meditate upon the flawless arhant Jindeva (the one who has conquered his desires) who is all knowing and devoid of all impurities. (Jnanarnva, p. 39.)



Driṣṭi Yoga (Preksha Dhyāna)

Preksha, the Yoga of Vision or seeing¹⁴ is the subtle form of meditation. It is known by various names in the Jain tradition. The word *preksha* is derived from the Sanskrit root verb *iksha*, which means “seeing.” With the *pra* prefix it means “seeing by entering in depth” or “observe carefully.” In Jain literature, two words are used to describe the Yoga of Light meditation: *preksha* and *vipashyana*. However, the term *vipashyana* is also used in Buddhist meditation techniques. Therefore, in the present Jain context, we use the term *preksha dhyāna* to avoid any confusion with the Buddhist terminology.

In the *Dashvaikalick Sutra* it is said:

See the atman through the atman. Seeing is the essential element of this meditation and therefore it is named preksha dhyāna.

Acharya Tulsi explains:

The Center of “seeing” or inner focus is known as ajnachakra (the third eye).

When the mind is focused on it the divine light pervades every part of the being.

The life of one who focuses on this center of life (in front of the nose between the two eye-brows)

is ever filled with the smile and joy.



Acharya Mahapragya elaborates:

The goal of the Yoga of Vision is to know one's self. As long as the soul is covered with afflictions and desires we are unable to know our self. Therefore, to remove this veil or covering it is necessary to concentrate the mind.

The Yoga of Vision is the technique of looking at the soul. Whom shall we see? We shall see our Self and experience our own nature. We shall manifest the true form of our own nature. Seeing the true form of oneself is the Yoga of Vision.

Collect your consciousness in the sushumna, the tenth gate (ajnachakra).

According to Maha Manaswi Shri Jinendra Varni:

Meditation beyond physical forms is known as Shukla Dhyāna (light meditation). This meditation is beyond name and form. One sees only the inner light, and it is therefore called shukla. The yogi experiences the indescribable form of God in the form of light. Therefore, this meditation is known as the meditation of light—shukla dhyāna.

According to Shubhachandrachrya,

[In this way] The ascetic who has understood the technique of mantra meditation, must then meditate on a point in front of the nose and in the middle of both eyebrow, focused on the unmovable form.



Surat Śabada Yoga (Yoga of Divine Sound)

In the Yoga of Sound (*Surat Shabda Yoga*), the gross material sound (*anhad* sound) manifests initially, and thereafter the essential inner divine sound (*anahad*), also known as OM or *Pranava*. It is the cosmic sound of the beginning.

There are several references to the essential cosmic sound in the context of Lord Mahavira's teachings:

Taking hold of this essential anahat element (the sound of OM) or Shivanam, the ascetics have gone across [beyond] this world of delusion and pain.

In this way meditation upon the *mantra* and the essential sound are described. Also the technique of meditation on the OM sound is elaborated:

O Ascetic! Meditate on the cosmic sound of OM because it is like rain for extinguishing the fire of suffering. And it is also like a lamp which illuminates the subtle essence of the sacred teachings. It is the governance of good deeds. (Jnanarnva, sarga: 38)

Acharya Tulsi says:

From the infinitesimal point and the divine sound the subtlest waves (vibrations) reverberate.

In his book, *The Method of Using Preksha Dhyāna*, Acharya Mahapragya writes:

Close both ears with your hands and listen to the inner sounds.



The *Jnanarnva* (sarga 36) says:

The mendicant with purified mind should meditate on the sky with rainbow, lightning, and the sound of thunder, and full of clouds.

Swami Jnananada says in the *Pandita Puja*:

In the divine sound of God (Bhagawan) all the mysteries are revealed.

Shri Jinendravarni states:

What does one hear with these ears? It is a sweet sound. . . Closing my eyes, as if I were united with God, I was away from this world. Only my Peace incarnate and dispassionate Lord (Mahavira) and I existed [ego and worldly concerns had vanished in the state of complete tranquility].

Atma

Here we present some references representing the Jain view on the nature of *Atma*.

This soul in itself is illumined by the light of knowledge. However, in this body it is covered by three coverings: the gross body and two subtle bodies (Taijas and Karman shareer). As long as this soul does not recognize its enlightened form the bondage remains.

An ascetic established in the Self (atma) is liberated. The ascetic who is not thus established does not attain liberation through mere observance of niyama (outer observances). The state of being established in Atma is the Right Faith (belief verified by experience) and firmness in this is the 'discerning character endowed with knowledge'.



Both the *Sankhya* system and the *Nyaya* systems of Indian philosophy consider that liberation can be achieved through reasoning. This is not the conviction expressed in the Jain teachings.

It is said in the PunditPuja Tika:

The person, who has recognized the true nature of the soul (atma) and experienced it through self knowledge, merges into the Pure Form and becomes paramatma (Lord, the Supreme Soul).

Further:

Whoever has recognized the true form of the Self (soul), his/her life only is an accomplishment.

Acharya Tulsi proclaims:

The only method to know Consciousness is to experience (the true nature of) one's Self and thus to purify and uplift the mental tendencies. It is most desirable for the practitioner to search for one's self by one's self.....There is no other means other than meditation which verifies subjectively and substantiates objectively that which previously was only known through listening or teaching.

The Nature of *Paramatma* (Supreme Soul)

The Jain text, *Jnanarnva* elaborates on the nature of the Supreme Soul:

Human beings without knowledge of the Supreme Soul wander through the law of karma in the deep forest of



the world. By the knowledge of the Supreme Soul a human being attains a prominent place—even greater than Indra (king of the gods). Know Him to be the true manifested Supreme Soul. He is the abode of all joys. He is the brilliant light of knowledge. He is the protector. He is the Supreme Person beyond thinking and His nature can not be described.

The One, who can not be described by words and is not conceivable as matter or material stuff is the Supreme Soul. He is infinite and transcends sound and has no birth, and is not subject to wandering in the world. With a still and tranquil mind meditate on the Supreme Soul.

The Pundit Puja Tika states:

By merely meditating upon Him all inflictions of the living souls (jivas) which have arisen from the world are destroyed. These are not destroyed through any other means. He is the Lord of three worlds, and is the Indestructible Supreme Soul.

Whatever is the Supreme Soul so am I. Whatever is my essential nature is the essence of Supreme Soul. Therefore, I am fitted for meditating on my inner Supreme Soul- none other.

Thus, we see that in Jain tradition (*dharma*) we are told that the destruction of *karmas* is accomplished through self realization. For this self realization three essential doctrines are stated in Jain Dharma: Right perception, Right knowledge, and Right action.



Jain *dharma* recognizes nonviolence as the highest *dharma* (duty). It believes in an egalitarian society that is built on the foundation of tolerance and good moral character. It proclaims that if you remove the dirty layers and coverings from the soul and abstain from harmful actions you will attain the knowledge of *Kevali* (“oneliness”) and you will become the Supreme Soul. Jain sages have described various forms of meditation, but have mostly elaborated on the *shukla dhyāna*, the meditation of light. In the *Vedic* literature this is known as the Yoga of light, and as meditation on the third eye. But in Jain literature the final step of meditation the Yoga of Sound is spoken of sparingly. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the great *tirthankaras*, ascetics and sages of Jain *dharma* were accomplished in these essential practices.

¹ In Indian religions, there is a recurrent metaphor for a sacred place where one can cross over easily and safely to the far shore of liberation (*moksha*): a limen or threshold. These thresholds between heaven and earth are charged with a power and purity which afford a spiritual crossing, and they are often associated with great events relating to the heroes of myth.

Tirtha can also refer to a holy person or path which affords access to the sacred. *Tirthankara* (In Sanskrit., ‘builders of the ford’). In Jainism, *Tirthankara* is the title given to the twenty-four omniscient spiritual teachers who have displayed the way of salvation. [From the *Oxford Concise Dictionary of World Religions*, p 597]

² *Kshatriya* is the warrior or royal caste within the caste system of India.

³ Mahavira's tribal affiliation is reflected in one of his later epithets, Nigantha Nataputta, which literally means "the naked ascetic of the Jnatrika clan."

⁴ “Beautiful looking”

⁵ Maya is the cosmic illusionary veil which attempts to keep us from experiencing the Divine.



⁶ Note the following reference: “Soul is my god. Renunciation is my prayer. Amity is my devotion. Self restraint is my strength. Non-violence is my religion.”—Acharya

Mahaprajna(http://www.herenow4u.de/Pages/eng/Sections/Towards_Inner_Harmony/TowardsInnerHarmony_15.Br.htm)

⁷ In the Indian traditions the word *brahmacharya*, generally, is used in the sense of continence, but restraint of all senses is implied in this concept. The one who has restraint over sensual desires lives in Brahma (the Infinite Spirit).

⁸ *Drīṣhti yoga* is known by various names in different texts and traditions: *Bindu-dhyāna*, *drīṣhti yoga*, *Atama-dhyāna*, *Preksha-dhyāna*, *Vipashyana dhyāna*, *Jyoti dhyāna*, *Shunya-dhyana*, *Nasagra dhyana*, *Shambhavi Mudra*, *Vaishvanavi-Mudra*, *Adhar dhyana*, *Sushumna dhyana*, etc.

⁹ It is also said in the *Yogashikhopaniṣad*, “Absorbing mind in *Bindu* behold the scenes of great distance.”

¹⁰ Literally, “Bridge-builder Mahavira and his All-uplifting Bridge”

¹¹ Jain Acharya Sushil Kumarji Maharaj Ji practiced various steps of yoga including the yoga of Sound vibration.

¹² The rules and vows for *Sadhus* and *Sadhvis* (monks and nuns) are much more detailed and strict (*mahavrata*). For the laity, the householders the rules are comparatively less severe (*anuvrata*).

¹³ The details of these *angas* were accessed on June, 26/2005 from <http://www.jainstudy.org/jsc7.03-OfromS.htm>

¹⁴ “Seeing” does not mean external vision, but subtle concentration by mental insight.

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Chapter Three

Buddhism





Lord Buddha and the Buddhist Tradition



The 6th century B.C.E. holds a significant place in the history of mankind. This period is known as the age of spiritual awakening. During this period many religious leaders were born and there arose many waves of spiritual knowledge in various regions of the world. In Iran, there was Zarathustra (the founder of Zoroastrianism); in China Confucius (the founder of Confucianism), and Lao Tzu (the founder of Taoism), were influencing people through their philosophical teachings. There was also a wave of spiritual revolution taking place in India. Its pioneers were Lord Mahavira and Lord Buddha.

The revolution in India was not merely one of religious fervor, but also involved the political and social arenas. Throughout this period of transformation the people raised their voices against the rituals and violent sacrifices of the established Vedic tradition. The caste system was also questioned openly during this period, and many other aspects of the prevailing tradition were seen to be governed by selfish motives.



Social Stratification

At the time of Buddha, Indian society was divided into four castes. These were the *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudra* classes. This division was not related to merit or deeds, but was a tradition simply based on birth. The four groups engaged in distinct and separate life styles. Marriage out of caste was simply not allowed. It is clear from Jain and Buddhist texts that *Brahmin* and *Kshatriya* castes were the ruling castes. They were invariably involved in tension with regard to their authority to rule over others. The *Kshatriya* consistently competed with the *Brahmins* in knowledge, science, and ascetic practices. The *Vaishya* class held an inferior status to the *Brahmin* and *Kshatriya*. The word householder was commonly used to refer to the *Vaishya* class. They were respected in royal circles solely on the basis of their wealth and status and therefore their representatives were quite influential in the King's court. The *Shudra* class, all non-Aryan or were aborigines, composed the lowest of these four castes. In addition to these four castes there also were the *Chandalas* (untouchables) who were so low that they were not even considered a caste. It was a sin to even see a *Chandala*, and even more so to touch one. They were segregated from the society. Also, at this time in Indian history, there were quite a few people in the grip of various cults, which were



organized on the basis of black magic, spirits, and demons. In general, it can be said that the fire of ingratitude, selfish attachment, hatred and atrocities prevailed throughout the land. The country was fertile ground for revolution.

Religious Conditions

At the time of Lord Buddha's birth the condition of religion (*dharma*) also had become chaotic and very confused. The society had fragmented into hundreds of sub castes. Religious practices had been reduced to empty rituals and outward display. People worshiped materialism (worldly gains in this life and after) while leaving true spirituality unattended.

At this time animal sacrifice was at its zenith. Each day the priests of the temples satisfied their selfish needs by slaughtering animals. Their blood covered the sacred sacrificial altars. Sacrificial rituals had begun to be looked upon as the path to liberation (*moksha*). Wealthy people believed that they could be absolved of sin by having animal sacrifices performed. The common and poor people were unable to afford such opulent sacrificial rituals. But these less fortunate people were engaged in equally delusional paths to liberation. Many practiced physical austerities for the sake of their spiritual well-being: standing on



one foot, meditating with one arm always raised, and extreme fasting, for example, were all resorted to this end. An immense illusory net of beliefs based on these austerities was on rise, and even Lord Buddha practiced some of these in his early ascetic life.

At the same time there were those in the society who supported neither the sacrificial sects nor severely austere practices. Predictably, a few of these aspirants revolted against these established practices. Turning their back to these prevalent rituals and showing their resentment toward these practices, these few nonconformists searched for the truth as wandering monks. The result: before the advent of Buddha various sects and schools of philosophy arose. During this period of religious confusion, many people were longing for a way to eradicate suffering and find suitable answers to the essential questions of life. None of the prevailing cults offered such a path. What was needed at this crucial time; were the key human virtues of compassion, loving kindness and sympathy. Lord Buddha appeared on this earth for the purpose of reviving these essential human virtues (benevolent *samskaras*).



Birth of Lord Buddha

In 563 B.C.E. Lord Buddha, whose family name was Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, was born in the valley of Nepal near the city of Kapilvastu in the forest of Lumbini. His father's name was Shudhodhana and his mother's name was Mahamaya Devi. Shudhodhana, who belonged to the famous Ikshvaku clan, was the king of Madhya Pradesh. Kapilvastu was the capital of his kingdom.

When the Buddha's mother was pregnant with this child she expressed her desire to the King that she be allowed to go to her father's house in the city of Devadeha. The King gladly accepted her wish and she set out for her father's house with a caravan of her attendants. On the way Mahamaya went into labor and gave birth to this radiant child. She then returned to Kapilvastu with her newborn child and her retinue in order to be with her husband, the king.

According to tradition, as the King was so overjoyed by the birth of his son, he summoned the wise sage and priest named Kaldeval to consult about the child's horoscope. After seeing the brilliant face of the child the sage proclaimed: "This exceptional child will be a great and wise (enlightened) man. Further, if he



chooses to stay as a householder he will become a sovereign king. If, however, he chooses to be an ascetic, he will become a Buddha—an enlightened being.”

All the rituals of a newborn were performed and he was named Siddhartha. But after the seventh day of giving birth to her son, his mother Mahamaya passed away. The responsibility for raising him fell on the shoulders of his aunt, Gautami. Later, the king made Gautami his queen. Having been raised under the loving care of Gautami, Siddhartha became known as Gautama.

Siddhartha’s Childhood

When the child Siddhartha became a youth the king sent him for education and study to the family Guru, whose name was Vishwamitra. Siddhartha had exceptional keen intellect and so he quickly grasped the knowledge of all subjects. Once, while he was walking in the royal gardens, a swan, who was crying pitifully, suddenly fell at Siddhartha’s feet. The swan had been struck by an arrow and was throbbing with pain. Siddhartha pulled the arrow from its body and proceeded to care for the stricken swan. In the meantime, his cousin, Devadatta came running and told him: “This is my swan! It has been struck by my arrow”. Siddhartha replied: “I have saved its life. It sought



refuge in me and so it is mine.” The argument grew fierce and the two boys finally took their dispute to the king. The king listened to both arguments and pronounced that the one who protects the life of a creature has the right to that creature. This was a great disappointment to Devadatta. He became envious and bore malice towards Siddhartha.

In the midst of all the comforts and luxuries in the palace, Siddhartha still loved solitude. This concerned the father who had planned to insulate Siddhartha from the harsh realities of everyday life. He succeeded in doing this until the day Siddhartha expressed a desire to take a walk in the forest outside the confines of the palace. Siddhartha set out for the forest riding in a beautiful chariot. The crowds of the city were eager to catch a glimpse of their prince who had been virtually cloistered for many years.

Four Passing Sights

While going through the crowd on the way to the forest the prince saw a man who was very old and feeble. The old man walked with the help of a cane and exerted a great effort. His body shook from old age. The prince asked the charioteer: “What kind of man is this?” The charioteer replied: “This is an



old man who once was like you, but he has become as you now see him because of old age. We will all become like this when we are old.” Upon hearing this, Siddhartha felt distressed and detached, and he immediately returned to the palace.

When the king came to know of this event, he became alarmed. When he discovered the cause of Siddhartha’s distress, he ordered the chief minister to prevent even the shadow of an old person to be seen anywhere near the palace. Once again the prince went for an outing to the forest. On his way this time he saw a sick and ailing man who was lying on the ground crying in pain. The prince asked the charioteer to stop and then he asked the charioteer who this man was. The charioteer told Siddhartha that this man was diseased and sick. He explained that disease is the nature of the body. The prince was overwhelmed with compassion and was unable to bear the sight of the ailing man. He had to return to the palace.

Due to the sudden return of the prince, the king discovered what had happened. After finding out the reason for Siddhartha’s anxiety the king ordered that neither old nor sick people should be allowed near the palace, thereby hoping to shield his son from these harsh realities. Nevertheless, Siddhartha became disturbed and restless from these two sights of suffering. He considered: If



old age and sickness are the nature of the body then there must be a way to get freedom from these menacing phenomena.

Thereafter, his mind could not find peace within the walls of the palace. One day he went out walking and as he was strolling he saw a corpse being carried to the cremation grounds. The loved ones of the deceased were following and weeping in great pain at their loss. This was the first time in his life Siddhartha had seen this, and he was astonished. He again asked his charioteer what was happening. The charioteer explained: “Some man has died and his relatives are taking his lifeless body to the cremation grounds.” Thus Siddhartha learned, to his despair, that all living beings must meet the same end. Overcome by such thoughts the prince returned to the palace.

Once again the king came to know of the event and thought it must be a bad omen that his son was repeatedly distressed by these common life events. He remembered the prophecy spoken at the time of Siddhartha’s birth and was greatly concerned. The King quickly made further arrangements to keep the prince tethered to the material world. However, Siddhartha continued to be distressed by the grim realities of life he had seen, and his detachment from the world only grew in the course of time. When the King saw that the prince was becoming even more



detached, he hurriedly arranged for Siddhartha to be married to a most beautiful girl named Yashodhara, the daughter of a neighboring king.

Yashodhara was always eager to serve her new husband with her devout love for him. When the prince became 26 years of age he was blessed with a son. Upon hearing the news of the birth of his son, instead of rejoicing, Siddhartha withdrew into a very contemplative mood. He thought to himself that the birth of his son was a bondage that would pull him away from spiritual thoughts. Therefore, he named his son Rahul. Rahu is the mythical deity in Hinduism who obscures the light of the sun during an eclipse.

The king arranged for the prince to be continually immersed in worldly pleasure and distracted from the spiritual path. Nevertheless, even a wife, son, throne, beautiful women, and all means of enjoyment were unable to satisfy or divert Siddhartha from his spiritual path. One day while he was on his way to participate in a garden celebration he noticed an ascetic (*sadhu*) passing by. Curious about the man who appeared to be an embodiment of detachment and filled with contentment, Siddhartha asked his charioteer about the man. The charioteer said: “Prince! He is a mendicant.” The prince further inquired,



“What is a mendicant?” The charioteer replied, “A mendicant is one who remains detached from the world and stays immersed in meditation. He shuns worldly pleasures and attachments. He has overcome the sorrows of old age, disease and death.” This discourse about the life of a mendicant was very pleasing and consoling to Prince Siddhartha.

Inspired by this exemplar of renunciation, Siddhartha approached his father with great respect and requested: “Father, now that your grandson has been born, please give me permission to renounce this householder’s life as my heart feels no pleasure in these worldly things.” The king was utterly shocked and tried to persuade Siddhartha with various arguments. Still determined, Siddhartha further asked: “Father, if you could find me a remedy for these four ailments I will abandon my desire to leave the palace life. These four issues are as following: I should never die, never become old, never experience sickness and never face any kind of deficiency. The King replied: “All these matters concern the natural laws. Who is there that has control over these things?” The king refused to give him permission to leave.



The Great Renunciation

That very day the child Rahul was seven days old, and the king made arrangements for a great celebration to mark the auspicious day. The celebration included opulent festivities with performances by attractive dancers. As Siddhartha was watching these festivities, he slipped into a state of deep contemplation and then fell asleep. When the exhausted dancers saw the prince sleeping, they too dozed off, sleeping wherever it was immediately convenient. After some time the prince awoke. He saw in the bright light of the lamps that these beautiful dancers, scattered here and there, were completely unconscious. He noticed that some of these sleeping damsels' mouths were hanging open, some were drooling, and some had their clothes disheveled. What had looked like a scene of rejoicing now appeared to Siddhartha as a cremation ground filled with dead bodies. An overwhelming sense of detachment consumed him. He returned to his private royal quarters where his wife and son were fast asleep. Seeing the beautiful face of his son he wanted to hold him, but he did not do so as this might awaken his wife and thereby ruin his secret plans. He decided at that moment to flee from his life as a householder.



Under cover of the silence of night, Siddhartha asked his charioteer, Chandak, to prepare the horses. In the midst of a summer night gleaming with the light of a full moon, Siddhartha exited the great gates of the palace. Crossing the boundaries of three states he reached the Anoma River. Siddhartha stopped at the banks of the river and with the sharp edge of his sword he cut off the locks of his hair and removed his princely ornaments and garments. Handing over his precious ornaments to his charioteer Chandak, Siddhartha asked him to return to the kingdom. The charioteer, much taken aback and distressed, returned to the kingdom and reported the incident. This flight of Siddhartha is known as “the Great Renunciation.”

In Search for Truth

As he continued on the way to Raj Graha Siddhartha came across three *ashrams* and stayed with their *acharyas* (teachers). However, their meditation practices seemed inadequate and incomplete to him. He decided to spend some time in solitude in the Pandava hills. After that he went to Uruvella (Bodhagaya) where there lived a pundit named Alara Kalama, an acclaimed teacher of Samkhya philosophy. Siddhartha studied under him and learned certain yogic techniques. Yet again, the inner quest of Siddhartha was not satisfied. From there he went to study with



Acharya Ruddrak (the son of sage Uddalak) who was a renowned teacher and scholar. He too could not fulfill the spiritual need of Siddhartha. Siddhartha then undertook a path of intense meditation and self mortification on the banks of the river Niranjana (Falgu). The practice of intense austerities made him frail and weak. At times he would become unconscious due to lack of food. Even with this practice of self mortification Siddhartha felt no closer to realizing the Truth. In this way many years passed during which he was performing arduous austerities.

After living and practicing in this manner for many years, Siddhartha began to feel disheartened. It is believed that in this state of mind Siddhartha saw Lord Indra (the king of gods) in a dream. Indra was playing a stringed instrument. One string of this instrument was too tight and the sound coming from it was discordant, while another string was too loose and was equally displeasing. A third string was neither too tight nor too loose and its sound was very pleasant. Siddhartha felt inspired that the lesson from this dream was that the middle way was the superior path. He could see that extreme austerities would not lead to the attainment of enlightenment. He realized that it was only proper to follow the middle path, and to abandon both the hard austerity of asceticism and the life of leisure.



The Great Realization

With this new realization, Siddhartha bathed in the river Niranjana near Bodhagaya, in state of Bihar in Northern India.¹ Determined Siddhartha, then, sat in meditation on a grass mat under a Banyan tree and practiced one-pointed focused meditation. He continued this practice until he attained *bodhi* (enlightenment or Knowledge) at the age of 35. His inner heart radiated with the light of spiritual knowledge (*brahmajnana*). He realized the Truth and experienced Inner Peace (*Shanti*). This experience is known as “the Great Realization or Enlightenment” (Buddhahood). From that point on Siddhartha was known as Lord Buddha and *Tathagata* (literally, “thus gone like that”). Having attained Buddhahood, the all knowing state, Siddhartha Gautama spoke these words:

I have run through a course of many births looking for the maker of this dwelling (body) and have not found him. Painful is birth again and again. Now you are seen, O Builder of the house (body), you will not build the house again. All your rafters are broken, your ridgepole is destroyed, the mind, set on the attainment of nirvana (enlightenment,) has attained the extinction of desires” (Dhammapada, Jaravaggo: 8 - 9)

Lord Buddha explained that the word “Buddha” means to be filled with unbounded knowledge as vast as the infinite space. He further said,



I Gautama have attained this state and if you try wholeheartedly you also can attain this state.

The Early Teachings of the Buddha

After his great enlightenment (*nirvana*), Siddhartha, now called the Buddha, proceeded to share the path to *nirvana* with others. He gave his first sermon, “Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Law,” in Rishi Pattam of Sarnath, near the city of Banaras in northeastern India. In response to this, five men became his disciples. During the remaining 45 years of his life he spread his message to all, from kings to poor alike, by traveling through neighboring states, such as Avadha, and Bihar. Most of his teaching took place in the state of Bihar and Ayodhya.

In his first sermon, the Buddha taught:

Mendicants should avoid these two extremes: First, avoid sensual pleasures and second, refrain from pain-inflicting austerities. Avoiding these two extremes I have found the Middle Way. This path leads to knowledge and truth. Also this is the bestower of Peace (shanti)

Prasenajit, the king of Koshel kingdom, Bimbsara, the king of Magadha, and Ajatshatru accepted this message and became the disciples of Lord Buddha. The Buddha established a community of his mendicant disciples. He gave his congregation of mendicants this three-fold proclamation: “I take refuge in



dharma; I take refuge in Buddha; I take refuge in *Sangha* (the community of monks).” In the time of the Buddha, Sanskrit was the established language of sacrament, therefore the word *dharma* is used; however, in later times, Pali and Prakrit became the languages of the common people and the Sanskrit word *dharma* became *dhamma* in the Pali language.

In accord with Lord Mahavira of Jain dharma, Buddha was also a great proponent of non-violence. He was always eager to sacrifice his own life for the sake of protecting the life of other beings. He once said to a king: “If you think you will attain heaven by sacrificing some helpless animal, then you should be able to find the greater reward by sacrificing a human being. Oh, King! Cut the shackles of that animal, and free the animal! Instead, sacrifice me. I ask you, will it not be, that you will acquire a greater merit through human sacrifice?” The king was shocked.

Many years had passed after Buddha had left Kapilvastu. His father, King, Shudhodhana, became anxious after not seeing or heard from his son for such a long time. He was eager to meet with him and sent many letters through various channels in order to contact him. Finally, the king sent Buddha’s childhood friend, Kalaudai, as an ambassador to carry a letter to him. When



Kalaudai reached Buddha, he himself undertook the vow of a mendicant as a follower of Buddha and never returned to the king. After six months had passed, Kalaudai finally gave the letter to Buddha and told him the news of his father. The Compassionate Buddha and his entourage set out for Kapilvastu on the day of full moon in the month of March, which is considered an auspicious time to travel. The whole city of Kapilvastu was overjoyed by the return of the prince, who was now the great Buddha.

After meeting with his ascetic son, the King became overwhelmed with emotions. He escorted his son to the palace along with his followers. All the townspeople came to see the great Buddha, but his wife Yashodhara could not gather the courage to see this sight—her husband as an ascetic. After persuasion by his father Buddha proceeded toward the inner quarters of the palace of Yashodhra. She came to meet him, and overwhelmed with emotions, fell at her Lord's feet. Lord Buddha soon left the palace and the kingdom of King Shudhodhana. As the time passed both Yashodhra and the King were initiated into the *Dhamma* (the Path) by the Buddha. The Buddha's step-brother Nanda was to be consecrated as the heir of the kingdom after the king Sudhodhana. But Nanda became deeply impressed by the sacred teachings of the Buddha, and in



the middle of the celebrations of his consecration and wedding ceremony, he decided to be initiated by the Lord Buddha. That very day he chose the life of a mendicant, instead of that of a sovereign king.

Yashodhra, gripped with love for her husband, desired that if Buddha would stay in Kapilvastu a little longer so that she would be able to see him more often. One day as Buddha turned back from the kingdom after begging for alms Yashodhra sent Rahul, her son, to see the Buddha, his father. Rahul uttered the words his mother had instructed and asked: “Dear father, give me my inheritance rights”. In response, when the Buddha returned to his *ashram* he told his disciple Sariputra to give Rahul the honor of renunciation. Thus at a very young age, Rahul became a renunciate and a part of the community. The King was very distraught when he heard about this.

At that time there was a *sanyasi* (renunciate) named Sanjaya who was residing with his disciples in Rajgraha. Two of his disciples were Sariputra and Modgalyayna, both sincere students who were always engaged in spiritual practices. When they heard about the essential truths and knowledge taught by the Buddha, they quickly became his disciples. Buddha proclaimed: “These two will be my chief and most trusted disciples.” In time the



Buddha's words came true. Devadatta and Ananda, cousins of the Buddha, also became his disciples. At the age of sixty the Buddha appointed Ananda as his chief attendant. Ananda remained in Lord Buddha's service wholeheartedly until Buddha's passing away from this material world.

Towards the Setting Sun (End of Buddha's Life)

Buddha continued to teach the path to ultimate freedom which is achieved by following the truth, practicing nonviolence, and maintaining purity of conduct. He gave understanding to people with regard to purity of the self and the Inner Light. In 483 B.C.E., at the age of 80, while in Kushinagar (in the Gorakhpur district in the state of Uttar Pradesh), the Buddha left his physical body and attained *Mahparanirvana* (Great Freedom).

In the last moments of his life he gave final words to his disciples:

O! Mendicants! Be a lamp to thyself and take refuge in yourself. Be your own support and make Dharma (the path of the Buddha) your lamp, taking refuge in it.



Doctrines of Buddhism

When we look at the fundamental doctrines of Buddhism we can see that they were derived from the prevailing *Sankhya darshana* (*Sakhya* Philosophy) and the latter *Upanishads*.

This is validated by the reference from Lokamanaya Balgangadar Tilak, a religious leader and great scholar of Indian philosophy:

This has been established indisputably that just as Jain Dharma, so also Buddha Dharma is a son of the Vedic Dharma. As a son, after taking his inheritance from his father follows his individual path, in the same way the Buddha Dharma separated from the Vedic Dharma. In other words, Buddhism is not a stranger or foreign to Vedic Dharma. Moreover, it is a branch arising out of the prevalent Brahman- Dharma.

The essentials of the teachings of Buddha Dharma are understanding the nature of the self and the purity in action, conduct, and thought. The Buddha declares:

Abandonment of all evil deeds and sins, accumulation of all meritorious deeds, and purification of the mind and conduct is the discipline of Buddha.

The Buddha emphasized that the middle path is the most desirable path. To have pure conduct one must avoid both of the extreme paths: intense austerities and sensual pleasures. The Buddha condemned violent acts such as animal sacrifices. He also protested against needless rituals, the self-claimed



superiority of the pundits (priest class) and *brahmins*, and the inequity of the caste system. He advocated a path that was pure, simple and based on the principles of moral conduct. The Buddha taught that by treading this path people can attain freedom and go beyond the cycle of birth and death (*samsara*).

Lord Buddha and his Path of Four Noble Truths

1. In this world there is suffering.
2. This suffering has a cause.
3. There is a way (cure) to become free from suffering.
4. The Eightfold path is prescribed to attain freedom.

In order to escape the cycle of death and birth and the suffering of the world a person should follow the Eight fold path.

This Eightfold path is as follows:

1. Right view
2. Right intent
3. Right speech
4. Right conduct
5. Right livelihood
6. Right effort
7. Right vigilance (Mindfulness)
8. Right Samadhi (Concentration)



The essence of Buddha's teaching is as follows:

1. Do not criticize others. Do not speak ill of others.
2. Do not commit any kind of violence.
3. Control yourself by choosing right moral conduct.
4. Eat in moderation.
5. Live in solitude.
6. Yoke the mind to meditation (Yoga).

The Main Texts of Buddha Dharma

After the *Mahaparanirvana* (the final liberation) of the Buddha, his prominent disciples recited and compiled his words on the basis of their memory. These have become the main texts of Buddhism. They are known as *Tripitika*, “the three baskets:” *Vinya Pitika*, a collection of the rules of discipline for Buddhist monks; *Abidhamma Pitika*, the philosophy and discourses of the Buddha; and *Sutapitika*, the principal doctrinal teachings of the Buddha's Dharma. There is an additional text (of later date) which is quite essential to the teachings of the Buddha. This is the *Melindpanha*, a compilation of the discourses between a Greek king named Melinda and the great Buddhist scholar Nagarjuna.



The Spread of Buddhism

Due to the influence of the Buddha's teachings, the heart of the great monarch Ashoka was transformed when he witnessed the great devastation and killing that took place in the battle of Kalinga. The Buddha's message of peace and non-violence inspired King Ashoka to raise the flag of the Buddha's Dharma (peace and brotherhood) instead of lifting arms for destruction. Thereafter, Ashoka played a pivotal role in the spread of Buddhism. He sent emissaries to various countries, and as a result, there are many *stupas* and relics with engraved Buddhist teachings in lands far from India. Ashoka's legacy is useful in reconstructing historical accounts of early Buddhism.

Buddhism had an important influence on many of the doctrines of Christianity, a Western religion, and it also became popular in many Eastern countries including Nepal, Tibet, China, Sri Lanka as well as in other parts of central Asia.



The Branches of Buddhism

About a hundred years after the death of the Mahatma Buddha, Buddhism split into two branches due to differing interpretations of his message and basic doctrines. These two branches, Hinayana and Mahayana, each developed according to their understanding of the principles of Buddha's message. Hinayana means "Small Vehicle." This tradition accepted the essential teachings of the Buddha as its foundation. It is also known as the "Southern Buddhism" or Theravada Buddhism (The Way of the Elders).

Human life is filled with suffering. The individual soul goes through the cycles of death and rebirth. Therefore, putting an end to this cycle ends the suffering. This can be accomplished through self restraint and control of one's selfish desires. This central doctrine of the Buddha is also delineated in the *Upanishads*. Buddha adopted the eightfold path in order to end the cycle of death and rebirth, and to put an end to the selfish desires. This doctrine is the foundation of the Hinayana sect of Buddhism.

The followers of the Hinayana sect do not consider Buddha as God, and do not prescribe his worship. According to the



Hinayana way, a human being can escape the cycle of birth and death and attain liberation by his own unaided effort.

In contrast to this, the Mahayana or “Big Vehicle” sect thinks of the Buddha as a form of God or a celestial being. The goal of the followers of Mahayana Buddhism is the attainment of Buddhahood for the purpose of helping other living beings. For this reason this sect teaches that it is necessary to take the vow of a *Bodhisattva*, an enlightened being, who has chosen to incarnate in this world to help fellow beings. Thus, the Mahayana sect gives importance to the ideal of the *Bodhisattva* in place of the ideal of the Buddha, an enlightened being who does not return to the cycle of death and rebirth. The followers Mahayana recognize *Bodhisattvas* such as Avalokiteshvara (“Lord who looks down” or a being of compassion). They further believe that one can attain liberation by worshipping representations of these *Bodhisattvas* in the form of *murtis* and symbols (various representations of the Bodhisattva).

Teachings of the Buddha

When we study the following specific episode in the life of the Buddha, the essence of his teachings is revealed to us.



Once, there were five *brahmins* (learned individuals from the priestly class) who approached the Buddha and requested: “Lord, please be the judge of the merit of our arguments.” One of the *brahmins* said: “In my *Shastras* and the sacred texts the form of God is described as such and such, and the method to attain that God is described as such and such.” And then the other *brahmin* heatedly argued: “No sir. This is all erroneous since, in my text, it is written the opposite. These texts which I have studied have prescribed a different path for God realization.” With increasing excitement and frustration the other *brahmins* too proudly presented their views, citing the respective *Shastras* and holy texts concerning the nature of God and His attainment. Lord Buddha listened calmly, and said: “Have you heard in any *Shastra* that God ever becomes angry, or does harm to anyone, or that God is impure?” They all replied in unison: “No, our scriptures tell us that God is pure, without any imperfections and, that He bestows prosperity and well-being.” Lord Buddha replied: “Friends, Why don’t you first strive to practice a pure and moral life and by doing so you can attain the knowledge of God?”

As described earlier, the *Sutrapitika* is one of the three divisions of the *Tripitika*, the Pali Scriptures of Buddhism. There are five sections of *Sutrapitika*, one of which is *Khuddaka Nikaya*.



Within *Khuddaka Nikaya* there are fifteen books. One of these fifteen books is the *Dhammapada*. The essential teachings of the Buddha on various matters are presented in the *Dhammapada*.

Here give some examples from the *Dhammapada*:

One should not associate with friends who are evildoers, nor with persons who are despicable. Associate with friends who are virtuous, and who are the best (in conduct) of men. (Panditavago)

Whatever an enemy may do to an enemy and whatever a hater may do to a hater, a wrongly directed mind will do us greater harm. (Chitavaggo)

Sandalwood or tagara, a lotus flower or a Juhi flower, all possess pleasant fragrance. However, the fragrance of virtue surpasses even these. (Puphaavaggo)

A person who constantly practices reverence, and who gives respect to the elders and seniors, for that person four things will increase: life span, beauty, happiness and strength. (Sahasavaggo)

One who has not practiced control of sexual desires and has not acquired wealth in youth pines away (in old age) like old cranes in a lake without fish. (Jaravaggo)

Follow the law of virtue but do not follow the path of unrighteousness. He who practices virtue lives happily



*in this world as well as in the world beyond.
(Lokavaggo)*

*One who becomes a sluggard or a glutton, rolling
himself about in gross sleep like a hog fed on wash,
that foolish one again and again takes birth.
(Nagavaggo)*

*It is difficult to obtain a birth as a human being.
Difficult is the life of mortals. Even more difficult is it
to hear the true law. The [most] difficult is to rise to
Buddhahood (enlightenment). (Buddhavaggo)*

*He who destroys life or kills, who speaks untruth, who
takes what is not given to him in this world, who goes
to another man's wife committing adultery, or who
gives himself to intoxicating liquors, such a person
uproots himself (digs his own root in his world).
(Malavaggo)*

*As rain breaks through an ill thatched house, so
passion makes its way into an unreflecting mind.”
(Yamkavaggo)*

*Better is one day of life for he who is wise and
reflecting, than a life of a hundred years for one who
is ignorant and unrestrained. (Sahasvaggo)*

*There is no fire like passion; and no ill like hatred;
there is no sorrow like this physical existence; and no
happiness higher than tranquility. (Sukkhavaggo)*



Lord Buddha's *Sadhana* (Meditation Practice) (Buddha's Teachings, Compared with the Vedic Dharma and Santmat)

It has been two thousand five hundred years since the passing (*paranirvana*) of Buddha. According to the Indian sources, the *Bhagavad-Gita* predates Buddha by at least 2500 years.² It is interesting to find similarities between the teachings from these two sources. Therefore, it would not be out of context to cite references which convey the similarities.

A good example is found in the *Gita* (Chapter 6: 5- 6):

Let a man lift himself by himself; let him not degrade himself; for self alone is the friend of the self, and the self alone is the enemy of the self. For he who has conquered his self by the self, his self is a friend, but for him who has not possessed his higher self, his very self will act like an enemy.

This can be compared with a similar teaching in the *Dhammapad's Attavaggo* where the Buddha states: "The self is the lord of the self."

The *Chittavaggo of the Dhammapada* (verses 10-11) also states:

Whatever an enemy may do to an enemy, whatever a hater may do to a hater, a wrongly directed mind will do even greater harm. Neither mother nor father nor



any relative will do a greater service than a well directed mind will do.

In the *Dhammapad's Dandavaggo* the Buddha warns:

He who in seeking his own happiness inflicts pain on other beings, who are also desirous of happiness, does not obtain happiness after death.

The identical ideas were stated in the older texts, such as the *Manu Smriti* and the *Mahabharata*.

The *Manu Smriti* (5/45) states

Those who seek pleasure by harming other beings are happy neither in living nor in death.

We can also compare these sources of teaching on the subject of merit in serving the elders. The *Dhammapada* states:

To him who constantly practices reverence and respects the aged four things will increase: life, beauty, happiness, and strength. (Sahsavaggo, 10)

Manu Smriti (2/121) also states the similar ideas:

To the one who is endowed with the nature of serving the elders and showing reverence each day, four things will increase:

- 1. Life*
- 2. Wisdom*
- 3. Fame*
- 4. Strength*

In the *Mahabharata's Ashwamedhaparva* it is stated:

As a man spins and pulls a strand (fiber) from a spool of jute, in the same way a yogi witnesses his atman by separating it from the body.



In this analogy, the jute represents the body and the strand represents the soul. This reference is known by the accomplished yogis.

The same images are used in the *Dighanikiya's Samanjaphalasutta* (1/ 2):

As a man pulls out a strand from a spool of jute, in his mind he determines that the jute and the strand (fiber) are now separate. But the strand was originally taken from the jute itself (it was a part of it).

The Vedic texts are replete with images of various deities, such as Brahma, Indra, Varuna, Yaksha, Gandharva, and Kamadeva. The later Buddhist texts also speak of many celestial realms with multiple deities. And it can be seen that both sets of texts elaborate on several philosophical concepts in identical ways including, sinful and meritorious deeds, heaven and hell, bondage and liberation, the cycle of *samsara* (death and rebirth).

Moral standards are also treated the same in both traditions: Stealing, consuming intoxicants, violence and adultery are the five sins to be avoided. The Vedic texts maintain that it is essential to abstain from them for the practice of inner meditation. Later, the Buddha gave the very same instructions to his disciples. He mandated that establishing oneself in the five virtues (*Shilas*), the seeker must practice meditation (*dhyāna*).



Similarly, in the early text *Yogshikhopanishad* (Chapter I) it is said:

Knowledge (wisdom) without yoga, and yoga without knowledge cannot give freedom. Therefore, a practitioner who seeks freedom must practice both knowledge and yoga.

And we find in the *Dhammapada's Bhikkhuvaggo* (13):

There is no meditation for one who is without wisdom (knowledge), and no wisdom for one who is without meditation. He, in whom there are meditation and wisdom, is close to nirvana.

Shri Gosvami Tulsidas Ji also echoes the familiar theme in the *Ramacharitamanas* when he says:

Wisdom coupled with yoga is the giver of moksha (liberation).

There are many other examples of this correspondence of concepts. Even when there is some variation in language, there is no difference in essence. In fact, there are also many discourses, in which there is not even a language difference. And it should also be noted that in various contexts terminologies is identical with same meaning. Due to the lack of space, we cannot explain all of the specific references here. But a few will be further elaborated for a better understanding of these ideas.



Understanding the Definition of *Nirvana*: The Essential Concept of the Buddha's Teachings

Let us now look at the word *nirvana* which is ubiquitous in the teachings of the Buddha and in the texts of Buddhism. We hear the word '*nirvana*' not only in the teachings of the Buddha, but also in the Jain texts, in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and as well, numerous references are made in the Santmat literature.

An early reference to *nirvana* is also found in the words of the 24th Tirthankara, Lord Mahavira, where the character of a true seeker of *nirvana* is described:

Those who are guileless and simple, their souls become pure. In those pure ones resides dharma (truth; the sacred law). Just as fire burns hotter and gives off more light when ghee (clarified butter) is added to it, in the same way the aspirant who is simple and chaste reaches nirvana.

The word '*nirvana*' and '*brahmanirvana*' appear frequently in the *Bhagavad-Gita*:

This is the divine state, O Arjuna. And having attained this, a man is not deluded. Fixed in that state, even at the hour of death, he reaches Brahmanirvana. (2/72)

He who finds his happiness within, his joy within, and his light only within, that yogi becomes divine and attains Brahmanirvana. (5/24)



Now we will present some of the words of the saints in this context.

Sant Kabir says:

Where that the Purusha (Supreme Being) resides, nothing else exists. This I know (from my experience). Whoever understands what I say [this mystery] has achieved nirvana.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji speaks about *nirvana* as a permanent and eternal state which can not be attained without first purifying the heart. He elaborates further that *nirvana* is only possible by immersing oneself in celestial sound:

The Divine Palace (Divine Abode of the Supreme) cannot be achieved unless one is pure in heart. By immersing oneself in the celestial sounds one is able to attain the state of nirvana.

Shrichand Ji Maharaj, the founder of the Udasi community, speaks about the mysterious nature of *nirvana*:

Guru is eternal and knowledge of the Vedas is subtle; the knowledge of nirvana is very mysterious.

In the words of Jagjivan Sahab:

[Those are fortunate] who are intent on listening to the inner celestial sound of unqualified nirvana.

Maharishi Mehi Paramhans Ji Maharaj says:

Unnamable, unapproachable, unseen, is the abode of Truth (the Supreme Reality). When the consciousness



(soul) immerses in this Reality, it reaches nirvana, the saints.

Sant Gareeb Das Ji says:

Allah and Ram are both beyond our understanding and without qualities. My Lord, resides in me, not in a palace or other abodes.

Sant Tulsidas Ji says:

A person who wants to attain the state of nirvana without meditation on God (Rama), even if this same person is endowed with learning, is like an animal without a tail [the learned person would be unable to attain the highest state without devotion].

What exactly does the word *nirvana* mean? In the Pali language, the term *Nirvana* is comprised of two words: *nih+vana*. The word *vana* means desire (*tanha*) and the prefix *nih* indicates negation. Thus *nirvana* means, “without desire.” Another way the word *nirvana* can be translated is “to extinguish—extinguishing of a flame.” In other words, when the flame of selfish desire is extinguished, *nirvana* is possible. A third way the word *nirvana* can be translated is “without an arrow.” I once heard this presented by a prominent Buddhist scholar named Bhikshu Jagdishkashyap who told a story about a certain man who approached the Buddha with a metaphysical question.



The Buddha responded:

If a man is struck by an arrow and is in excruciating pain, will he not remove the arrow and place medications on the wound? Or will that person first search for the cause of the arrow being shot at him? Will he first seek to know the intention of the person who shot the arrow?

The inquirer answered, that, the person will first remove the arrow and treat the wound. The Buddha then said:

Dear friend, you have been struck by the arrow of death, the cycle of death and rebirth (Kala), and therefore you should first rid yourself of the suffering, just as the man struck by an arrow first removed the arrow. Then you may consider questions about who created this world, and why, and by what means.

This example shows that getting rid of the arrow of suffering is a way to understand *nirvana*, which is ridding ourselves of the cycle of birth and death. It is not an exaggeration to say that one who conquers death through *Sadhana* (meditation) attains *nirvana*.

Several definitions of *nirvana* are given in the Buddhist texts:

Nirvana is a state in which all the samskaras (imprints of karmas and tendencies) are erased. It is a state in which all afflictions and pains are destroyed, selfish desires are overcome, and one is devoid of attachments. (Dighanikaya, Mahapdanasutta)

Another Buddhist text recounts of a time when an ascetic approached the Buddha and asked:



“What is nirvana?” Buddha replied: “Dear one, nirvana is cessation of passion, hatred, and attachment.” (Buddha Philosophy and Literature)

The Way to Attain Nirvana

After exploring some background on the literal definition of *nirvana*, more questions arise. How can a person attain *nirvana*? How can we have knowledge of this state? To begin to answer this, we must refer to the Buddha’s teachings on the practice of meditation and the state of *Samadhi*, the final step of the eight-fold path. The Buddha taught about the four stages of concentration in the practice of *dhyāna*. These are described in detail in the *Dighanikaya’s Samanjaphalsuta*. There is also a well known story about an ascetic who once approached the Buddha to ask: “What is the path for realizing *buddhahood*?”

Buddha answered:

This is the noble eight-fold path. Only by walking on this path is one able to arrive at the goal.” (Buddha Philosophy and Literature)

It will also be important to make a general comparison of the relevant practices in the Santmat and Buddhist traditions. In Santmat we practice four stages of meditation. This is similar to the Buddhist tradition, which speaks about mantra meditation,



visualization of a sacred form, the yoga of vision (intense focus) and the yoga of sound.

However, Buddhists are not all in agreement with certain aspects of *mantra* meditation, and they do not all recite the same mantra. Tibetan Buddhists recite “*Om Mani Padme Hum*” whereas Japanese Buddhists (SGI sect) recite: “*Namyo Hareng Kyo*”. Most Buddhists use the “OM” or “*Namo tasya bhagavato arhato samma sambuddhas* (Honor to Him the Blessed One, Who Conquered all Obstacles, and the Fully Enlightened One)” mantra. Many also recite the triple gem: “*I Take Refuge in Buddha, Dhamma and Samgha.*”

Another practice that is common to both traditions is mental concentration on a physical form. Buddhist texts elaborate on this in a similar way to *mānas dhyāna* of Santmat.

In the Buddhist text *Digha Nikaya*, mendicants are given these instructions:

A bhikkhu should sit in a crossed legged posture, keeping the back and neck erect, and become mindful of all directions. He should then collect the wandering mind which is scattered in all four directions

By focusing within, the aspirant purifies the mind. This text, *Digha Nikaya*, notes various details concerning concentration on a physical form: The aspirant focuses mentally on a physical



form, then by engaging the mind creates a mental body that is different from the physical one. The mental image thus created will be more vivid, well-built, and will have radiant physical organs.

In my understanding, this is an equally valid interpretation and description of the Santmat technique for meditating on the physical form (*Mānas dhyāna*). There doesn't seem to be any other way to describe it. The Buddhist text, *Digha Nikaya*, further elaborates about the divine eyes and divine ears.

We find also in the *Buddhacharya*, written by the great Buddhist scholar Rahul Samskratayn, a record of a story about Rahula, the son of the Buddha:

Rahul sat in a yogic pose with erect body. He kept his mind in front (focused mind in front of the eyebrows).

The *Rig Veda* also speaks of keeping the mind focused in front while sitting in a yogic pose. In Santmat, this same technique is known as *Driṣṭi Yoga*.

It is also said in the *Digha Nikaya*:

A mendicant sits in a forest under a tree or in a calm empty space in a firm posture while keeping his body erect.



The *Bauddhacharya* also refers clearly to the inner light in several passages. For example:

Oh Brahman! I light the inner light, leaving aside the wood fire (fire of ritual sacrifice). I remain concentrated in light while practicing brahmcharya (celibacy; abiding in the divine state).

And also explains inner practice of as the performance of true sacrifice:

Oh Brahman! This ego is a fire pit for the fire ceremony, anger is the smoke of the fire ceremony, speaking untruths are the ashes, and the heart is the place of light. One who disciplines the self attains this inner light (performs the true sacrifice).³

The *Digha Nikaya* further describes this experience of seeing the inner divine light and hearing the inner divine sound. It says:

Oh Mahalee, through deep concentration the mendicant attains one-pointed samadhi, and beholds the celestial forms in the east. This is known as ekangi samadhi (one-limb samadhi), in which the divine sight opens up. In this deep concentration, the mendicant only sees the divine forms, but does not yet hear the divine sounds. However, in the state of ubhyangi samadhi (two-limb samadhi), the meditator sees the divine forms in the east, and also hears the divine sounds.⁴

In the following passage the Buddha describes the mysterious and ineffable nature of *nirvana*:

This is that space in which there is no earth, no water, no fire and no sky. . . . It is not this world, it is not the other world, and there is no moon and no sun. Dear aspirant, no one goes there and no one comes from there and no one stays there. No one gets separated and no one gets born. It is without beginning and



without any support. All sorrows end here (In realization of this truth suffering ends). (Bouddha Philosophy and Literature)

It is said in the *Digha Nikaya*:

In that space there is no talk of creation, sustaining of creation or death. In this space infinity abounds. There is no water, no earth and no light. There is even no air.

Thus it can be seen that the state of liberation that both the Buddha and the sages of the *Upanishads* referred to as *nirvana* is the same as the state of liberation that the Indian sants call *mukti*. The Buddhist and Vedic texts, as well as the Santmat texts, are in complete agreement with respect to these concepts of *nirvana* and *mukti*. This will be clear as we compare some of these references from various texts.

The *Katha Upanishad* describes the state of *nirvana* as follows:

There the sun does not shine, nor the moon. There is no light and not even fire can exist there. But due to its (that mysterious power) existence it gives light to all of creation. And all creation is seen by its light.

In the *Bhagavad-Gita* Lord Krishna says:

There the sun does not shine nor moon nor fire. Having reached this Divine abode (My abode) no one returns.

Saint Kabir Sahab elaborates on the Highest State:

Let me give you a depiction of that realm. In that realm there is no day, no night, no sun, no moon, no



stars, neither light nor darkness, and no air and no water. The only ones who have knowledge of this realm are those who have visited there (have experienced this state). There is no earth, no sky, and only a few saints dwell in this mysterious realm. There is no fear of death; there is neither sunlight nor shade. A Yogi (hatha yogi, through physical exercises) cannot fathom this world through yoga. The ascetic can not find it through penance, and it can only be attained through the constant practice of meditation. The one who knows the inner workings of consciousness, in the mind, realizes this realm (state).

Guru Nanak Dev describes this state in these words:

There is no shimmering of moon or stars, no rays of the sun, no flash of lightening in that place. One cannot even speak about this place. There are no symbols or words that can describe it. Only accomplished souls experience [enjoy] this heavenly realm.

Saint Charandas Ji says:

There is no sun, no moon, and no twinkling stars. There are no gods (the trinity: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva) who dwell there, and even maya (creative power of the divine) with the three qualities (gunas) has no power there. It is beyond the Vedas, yoga, sacrifice, and austere practices. There is no air, no earth, no fire, no sky, no day, no night, no sins and no good deeds. It is beginning, middle, and end of all. Says Charandas, this state is Brhaman (Infinite Being) Itself.



We have seen that the saints, the Buddhist monks, and the Jain [spoken of in the previous chapter] teachers all describe the ultimate goal of the spiritual journey as liberation.

After attaining this state the Buddha proclaimed in ecstasy:

O builder of the house! I have seen you and you will not build the house again. Your rafters are broken, your ridgepole is destroyed! The mind established in nirvana has extinguished all past karmas, and all selfish cravings have been destroyed. (Dhammapada, Jaravaggo)

The *Mahopanishad* tells of a sage who was immersed in the holy river of wisdom, devotion, and meditation. This sage cries out in similar manner:

Having seen the transcendent (beyond), the knot of the heart (ignorance) is disentangled, all doubts have disappeared, and all karmas have been destroyed!

This is a brief discourse on Lord Buddha's teachings on *nirvana* and *sadhana* (the meditation practice).

Was Buddha an Atheist?

In the following section we try to address the claim made by many, including scholars, that since the Buddha did not explicitly speak of God he was a *nastika* or non-theistic.



All the theistic religions of the world recognize the existence of God. The Divine Being is referred to by various names due to different languages: *Brahman* (*Hindu*), God (Christianity), Allah (Islam), Buddha (Buddhism), Tao (Taoism), Yahweh (Judaism), and Ahur Mazd (Zoroastrianism). Generally, we speak of a religion with a belief in God as a theistic religion. Religions which do not have a belief in God would be called atheistic.

Upon careful consideration, we can see that there are in fact two types of atheism: entirely atheistic and partially atheistic. The Belief Systems which do not have a belief in the existence of either God or soul are considered to be entirely atheistic. Those which do have a belief in the soul but not in God are considered partially atheistic.

In modern times some people have interpreted the Buddha's silence on the issue of the existence of God as atheistic. In their opinion, Buddha refused to answer any questions regarding the existence of the Divine Reality and the Soul (*Atman* or *Jivatman*), and therefore they have concluded that Buddha was an atheist.

However, in my opinion these kinds of conclusions demonstrate limited knowledge and ignorance about the essence of the



Buddhist texts. In fact, Buddhist literature contains multiple references to the soul (*atta* or *atman*), the Lord (*Natha*), and the maker of the body.

Examples can be found even in the *Dhammapada*, where the Buddha elaborates on Soul or self (*atta*):

The atman is the lord of atman. What else could be the Lord? When the individual self (jivatman) is well subdued, a man finds the Lord (Natha) who is difficult to fathom. (Dhammapada 12/ 4)

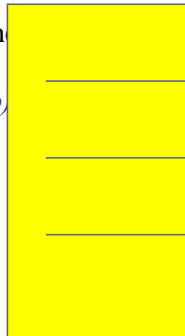
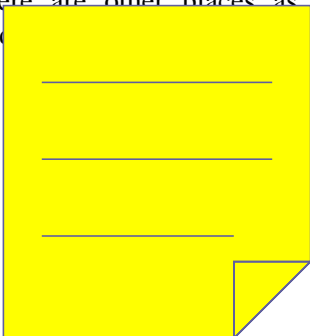
Some scholars have interpreted the word ‘lord’ in this verse as if it literally means “lordship.” However, even a cursory examination of the words in Pali, the original language of these texts, yields the intended meaning. In Pali the word ‘lord’ is in the second case accusative, and therefore it would best be translated as ‘to the lord’.

The noted Buddhist scholar Bhikshu Rahul Sankrityayan has explained this in his rendering of this verse of the *Dhammapada*:

A man is the lord of himself. Who else then could be the lord? If the self is wholly disciplined then he is able to attain a lord who is difficult to be attained.

There are other places as well in the *Dhammapada* where the Buddha speaks of the body:

... as I have seen you. . . (Jaravaggo)





“Impermanence” (*anicca*) of Buddhism and “Not real” (*Maya*) of the Vedic Dharma

In the Vedanta literature, in the *Upanishads*, and in the literature of the saints, this physical world is said to comprise both name and form, and is referred to as *maya*. *Maya* is understood to be illusory and not real, to be ever-changing, and dependent upon a higher reality. In the *Chandogya Upanishad*, *Brhidarnyaka Upanishad*, *Mundaka Upanishad*, and *Prashna Upanishad* it is repeatedly stated that the nature of the world is transitory, destructible, and not real. Therefore, we must seek for that essence which is constant, true and unchanging by transcending these realms of name and form.⁵

The world of name and form is also described as *avidya* (ignorance) in the *Katha* and *Mundaka Upanishads*. In the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, the world is also described as illusory *maya*.

The *Upanishads* also explain the nature of *atma*:

The soul (atman), which is beyond name and form, is brimming with joy and tranquility. In its Turiyatita form (the fifth state—a state of cosmic consciousness; a state of unity with the source), atman is beyond good and evil⁶. (Teja bindu Upanishad)



Lord Buddha says:

A mendicant is one who has no attachment to the world of name and form. He is one who does not grieve for what is not real (asat, the ever changing reality). This is the true mendicant. (Dhammapada, Bhikkhuvaggo)

In the *Ramcharitmanasa*, Saint Tulsida says:

Name and form are the two obstructions to God.

All of these references from the *Upanishads* and the texts of the saints, show agreement with the words of the Buddha, not difference.

The Ineffable Divine and Silence

One person may say the true form of God is Nameless (transcending any human definition), a second person may say the true form of God is Soundless (*nishabda*; beyond sound) and yet a third may keep silence in regard to the nature of the Divine. Is it logical to simply label the one who keeps silence an atheist? The wise person should reflect on this matter. If you say that the Divine Reality is nameless and then proceed to describe Him, are you not contradicting yourself? How can you describe something which is nameless? In thinking about this example, one might well conclude that the third person, who was



silent when describing God, was actually closer to the nameless description of God.

Keeping silence in answer to the question of the nature of the Divine, is also found in the *Upanishads*. A prime example of this is found in the famous discourse between Sage Vashishta and Shri Ram in the *Yoga Vashishta*. Shri Rama had queried Guru Vashishta about the nature of *Atman* and *Brahman* (the Supreme Reality). In response the Guru remained silent. Ram repeated the question. Guru Vashishta remained silent. Shri Rama asked a third time, and still the great sage remained mute. With joined palms Ram then asked his teacher Vashishta: “Reverend Sir! Are you displeased with me and therefore not answering my question, since you always assist me in understanding?” Guru Vashishta replied: “My dear son! I am not displeased with you. I have been answering the question which you have posed. The answer to your question is only given in silence, since the Divine is ineffable, unmanifest, and beyond the senses. How could I describe the nature of the reality which transcends the senses through these very sense organs (speech)?”

The point here is that if we were to call the Buddha an atheist when he is silent on the question of the nature of the Divine, as some people have, then logically we must also call Guru



Vashistha an atheist when he is silent in answer to the same question.

Shunya and Transcendent Reality

Some scholars have expressed certain doubts about the religious nature of the Buddha's teachings claiming that he only promulgated belief in "emptiness" or "nothingness," (the literal meaning of *shunyata*) or "annihilation" (the literal meaning of the word *nirvana*), not in the existence of God or Higher Reality. Therefore, they argue, his philosophy should be considered as nihilistic. According to their reasoning, it would follow that those who teach about "emptiness" or "nothingness," in the sense of the transcendent form of Ultimate Reality is also referred to *as shunya* cannot be theistic. However, teachings about *shunyata* (emptiness) are not only found in Buddhist literature, but are also prominent in the writings of many of theistic saints. Here are some examples:

Gorakh Nath Ji says:

*It (God) is neither existent nor non-existent (shunya);
its nature is beyond the reach of senses and thought.*

Sant Kabir Sahab says:

*Meditation on the Formless (shunya) is enjoyed by all
knowers of Truth.*



Guru Nanak Dev Ji says:

In the thought-less state of Samadhi (sunna, emptiness), neither maya (illusion) nor the snare of mind exist. Only the gracious God exists.

Paltu Sahab says:

Staying in solitude and meditate on emptiness (shunya).

Saint Dadu Dayal Ji says:

That [Ultimate] Reality is beyond the dual categories of qualified and unqualified; it is Emptiness which transcends emptiness (shunya).

Saint Charan Das says:

When the soul is absorbed on the peak (highest inner realm) of emptiness, then it experiences rapture.

This emptiness is also known as ether (*akasha*) or void (*avakasha*). In the *Ramcharitamanasa*, Gosvami Tulsidas Ji invokes Lord Shiva:

I invoke the name of Shiva--Lord Shiva, who dwells in the space of infinite knowledge (akasha)]”

There are discussions about *shunya* in the *Tantra Shastra* and also in the *Jnanasankalni Tantra*, where it says,

Meditation is not meditation unless the mind is united with Shunya” (57).

Maharishi Mehi says:

Consciousness that is traveling beyond sunna (void) and mahasunna (the great void) traverses the realm of



bhanvar gupha (the whirling cave). There it experiences the sound of Truth (sat), which is the Original Sound. This Sound embodies the essence of the spiritual preceptor. O Practitioner! Hold on to that sound and become one with that True Sound.

In the *Upanishads* there are multiple references to Emptiness or Space (*shunya*). In the fourth *Brahmana* of the *Mandala Brahmanopanishad* it is said:

There are five kinds of celestial Shunya (ether) which are increasingly more subtle: akasham, parakasham, Mahakasham, Suryakasham and Parmakasham. The infinite light permeates all of these akasham, but the Parmakasham is ineffable and is brimming with infinite bliss. It is the essential element.

When one considers all these descriptions of *Shunya* (emptiness or void), the question arises whether the composers of the *Upanishads* and the saints were atheists. The univocal response is, of course, that they are not atheists. How then could one logically consider the Buddha to be an atheist? The Buddha regularly speaks of both *nirvana* and *Shunya* in almost identical terminology, and yet he is accused of atheism solely on the basis of his silence on this question about the nature of God.



Purity of Conduct and *Nirvana*

Throughout the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, and the literature of the saints there are exhortations to follow the path of morality.

For example, in the *Brahmanda Puranottar Gita* it says that one cannot attain *Brahman* without first being purified:

This body has nine gates. Without purifying this body no one can attain Pure Brahman. Thus say the wise ones.

Sant Kabir Sahib says:

By carefully tending to the life of morality, the bride (atman) and groom (God) enjoy bliss.

Guru Nanak Dev says:

The Truth can only be placed in a clean vessel, and few indeed are those who live a pure life.

The *Katha Upanishad* underscores the necessity of the life of morality:

Those who have not abstained from wicked acts, whose senses are not calm, and whose minds are agitated, can not attain this [the Ultimate Reality] through prajna (spiritual knowledge).

The Buddha gives instructions to follow five essential ethical principles. He teaches abstention from lying, stealing, intoxicating substances, violence, and adultery, and claims that the one who indulges in these sins brings his own destruction.



In the *Dhammapada* it is said:

He who destroys life, who speaks untruth, who steals, who goes to another's wife and who takes intoxicants; even in this world he digs up his own roots. (Dhammapada, Malavaggo).

In the words of Maharishi Mehi we find similar instructions:

Untruth, intoxicants, adultery, violence (in the form of harming other living beings or even eating meat), and stealing, are the five sins which humans should avoid.

Right Association (*Satsang*); Guru (*Spiritual Guide*), and *Dhyāna* (Meditation)

The ancient sages and *rishis* sang the praises of these three— the spiritual preceptor (*guru*), meditation (*dhyāna*) and fellowship (*satsang*).

Lord Buddha also glorifies these three in the form of *the Three Refuges*, also known as the Triple Gem:

Take refuge in Buddha, take refuge in Dhamma (the path of meditation), and take refuge in the community of monks. Thus the Buddha is clearly in agreement with the ancient sages.

The Buddha's teachings clearly seem to be in agreement with theistic texts and the teachings of other sages.



The Concept of No-self (*anatta*) and Reincarnation: A Contradiction?

It is generally accepted that someone who holds to the theory of no-self would not have room for reincarnation in his philosophy. It is also assumed that a believer in n-self cannot also believe in the concept of transmigration. But, the Buddha himself speaks about his own multiple lives. His *Jataka Tales* (the stories of Buddha's past lives) are the prime evidence.

The following verse from the *Dhammapada* can be presented as testifying his belief in the reincarnation of the soul:

*I have run through a course of many births looking for
the Maker of this dwelling and have been unable to
find Him. Painful is birth again and again.
(Dhammapada, Jaravaggo).*

Conclusion

Theorists of Atheism typically do not believe in an afterlife, and therefore, for them this life is the extent of fulfillment. They do not consider that there is life after the death of the gross body, and they disregard the traditional belief in heaven and hell. Consequently, the happiness of this physical body is their ultimate goal. In contrast to those opinions, Buddha unequivocally speaks about life after the physical death of the



body and gives great details of heaven and hell. He does not consider the pleasures of this body to even be fulfilling. The atheists say, “However insignificant the contents in your hand may be, they are more valuable than the hope of possessing golden coins tomorrow.” They would also say that the hope of finding a peacock tomorrow would never justify letting go the mere pigeon which you hold today.

In contrast to such statements, we read in the words of Buddha:

If by giving up trivial pleasures one might acquire higher joy, the wise man must give up the pleasure of little value, looking toward the greater contentment.

By reflecting upon the essential teachings and beliefs of the Buddha, such as *nirvana*, the life of moral rectitude, his belief in heaven, hell, and reincarnation, we see that his teachings are fairly similar to the ancient teachings that were prevalent at the time that the Buddha taught. It would be short-sighted and, too simplistic to call Buddha an atheist solely on the basis of his silence in regard to the nature of the ineffable, transcendent Ultimate Reality. It is ironic that Buddha has the status of “the ninth incarnation of Vishnu” in Hinduism, and at the same time is rejected by some as an atheist. Before making such a claim one must carefully study the teachings of Buddha. It requires cautious and careful consideration of the question: Was the Buddha a theist or an atheist?



¹ According to a legend, after his bath Siddhartha is offered milk and rice by a maiden Sujata. In receiving the food Siddhartha marked the end of his life of asceticism, as well as the turning point—attainment of enlightenment.

² Various Indian scholars date the *Bhagavad-Gita* around 2500B.C.E. The Western scholars argue, however, that the *Bhagavad-Gita* was composed around 3rd century B.C.E.

³ Referring to the Vedic Ritual of Fire-Sacrifice. This text interprets the fire ritual as symbolic.

⁴ The texts of Tibetan Buddhism elaborate on the experience of Light and Sound:

O nobly-born, when thy body and mind were separating, thou must have experienced a glimpse of the Pure Truth, subtle, sparkling, bright, dazzling, glorious, and radiantly awesome, in appearance like a mirage moving across a landscape in springtime in one continuous stream of vibrations. Be not daunted thereby, nor terrified, nor awed. That is the radiance of thine own true nature. Recognize it. From the midst of that radiance, the natural sound of Reality, reverberating like a thousand thunders simultaneously sounding, will come. That is the natural sound of thine own real self. Be not daunted thereby, nor terrified, nor awed.

(Extracts from *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Bardo Thodol), edited by Dr. W. Y. Evans-Wentz (London, 1957)

Divine Sound is also known as the Sound of Silence:

As you calm down, you can experience the sound of silence in the mind. You hear it as a kind of high frequency sound, a ringing sound that's always there. It is just normally never noticed. Now when you begin to hear that sound of silence, it's a sign of emptiness – of silence of the mind. It's something you can always turn to. As you concentrate on it and turn to it, it can make you quite peaceful and blissful. Meditating on that, you have a way of letting the conditions of the mind cease without suppressing them with another condition. Otherwise you just end up putting one condition over another.

(Ajahn Sumedho, a bhikkhu of the Theravada school of Buddhism in “The Sound of Silence.”)

In the Buddhist text, the *Surangama Sutra*, *Bodhisattva* relates to the Sound meditation:

*Ananda and all you who listen here
Should inward turn your faculty
Of hearing to hear your own nature
Which alone achieves Supreme Bodhi.*



*That is how enlightenment is won.
Buddhas as many as the Ganges' sand
Entered this one gateway to Nirvana.
All past Tathagathas
Have achieved this method.
All Bodhisattvas now
Enter this perfection.
All who practice in the future
On this Dharma should rely. . .*

(The *Surangama Sutra*: Selections from the Upasaka Lu K'uan Yu
Translation, Published by Rider and Company, London).

⁵ The Madhyamika School of Buddhism states that reality (*shunya*) is the transcendent, indefinable and immanent in all beings. This is also called *Shunyam Tattvam*.

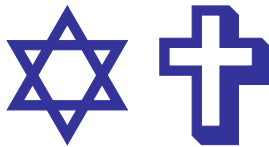
⁶ The first state is *Jagrata*, the conscious state; the second is *svapna*, the dream state; the third is *sushupti*, the dreamless sleep; the fourth is *Turiya*, a serene transcendental state; the fifth is *Turiyatita*, "beyond the fourth," a state of pure awareness.

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Chapter Four

Judaism and Christianity





The Roots of Christianity: Biblical Judaism

Christianity has its roots in the ancient religion of Biblical Judaism.¹ Ancient Judaism arose in Middle Eastern Asia.² For many centuries before the time of Jesus, the religious and political identities of the people of the Judaic tradition had been quite unsettled. The geographical basis of Judaism was originally the country that is today called Israel. This tiny sliver of land was located along major trade and travel routes connecting the empires of the continents that touch the Mediterranean Sea. As a result, the land of Israel³ was invaded and ruled by various foreign powers throughout history.

The inhabitants of this land also experienced cycles of famine, causing periodic migrations to other territories. The early generations of the people of Judaism were made into slaves during their sojourn in Egypt, had been taken into captivity by Babylonian conquerors, and had experienced the destruction of their holy temples and towns at the hands of the Assyrians, the Greeks, and the Roman empires. These people of ancient Judaism are commonly referred to as the Jews.⁴

The Jews had been dispersed, partially re-gathered, re-combined and re-located several times. The people and their religious



traditions carry the marks of these disruptions and historical interventions. This can be seen in the texts of their Scriptures⁵ where layers of re-interpretation and re-application are compounded and recorded, as hopes alternated with national tragedies.

The Mosaic Religious System of Judaism: Exile, Liberation and Covenant

The core system of Biblical Judaism first crystallized during the years of the Exodus of the Hebrew tribes from Egypt where they had been enslaved. The history and tales of the formative years of Judaism are said to have been recorded by Moses. Moses was the prophet who facilitated the Jewish liberation from Egypt, led the people through the desert to their promised land, and also presented the people with the words of the covenant from their God.⁶ In their original and most basic form, this covenant was a list of laws inscribed on tablets of stone, what we today know as the Ten Commandments. These are the essential moral principles that govern the conduct of personal and social religious life. These moral codes, basic to all religions teach worship of one God and prescribe various rules such as not killing, not stealing, not lying, and not coveting.



Monotheistic Tendencies

The foundation of the early Mosaic religion was belief in a single transcendent deity who was revealed through the mediation of prophets. This deity was to be honored and obeyed. Various rituals were performed by a priesthood to atone for the sins of the people and to bring about their reconciliation with God. The task of the priests, similar to the *brahmins* in the *Vedic Dharma* was to mediate the religious rituals of temple service and animal sacrifices as proscribed in the Mosaic Covenant. Social consequences for disobedience were severe, including being stoned to death by the community and banishment from society. Rewards for loyalty and compliance were extreme as well.

Alternate Jewish Traditions

In addition to the core Mosaic tradition there arose multiple layers of interpretation and applications made by generations of Hebrew sages. These included the words of various Prophets, who often confronted the injustices and immorality of the rulers, and warned the people about mere external obedience to the rituals.



The Nature of God

The nature of God is revealed within the first chapters of the Hebrew Bible in the stories of the Creation. God in this tradition is transcendent just as *Brahman* in the *Vedic Dharma*. The God of the Jews is described as the cause of all that exists, which he brought into manifestation through the sound vibration of his Word.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. (Genesis 1:1-3)

The Mystical Thread

There were threads of mystical and esoteric teachings woven into the tapestry of the Jewish religion, just as we see in the various religions of the world. Embedded even in the core stories about Moses, we read about his personal experiences of the deity. Moses expressed his visions of God in terms of light and sound.



The God who is transcendent also manifests his immanent presence to Moses as light and sound at the “Burning Bush” in the desert where he was tending his flock:

There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.” When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.”

“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” (Exodus 3:1-3)

Later, Moses meets with God on the top of Mt. Sinai. This experience is also related in terms of light and sound.

After his first encounter with God on Mt. Sinai, Moses tells the people and they experience the power and majesty of God’s presence.

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. . . And the sound of the trumpet grew louder



and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him. (Exodus 19:9-19)

Centuries later we again hear of the mystical experiences of divine light and sound in the words of the prophets of Judaism. For example, the Prophet Ezekiel expresses his mystical vision in imagery that is reminiscent of the metaphysical visions of reality within the Santmat tradition.

I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light.

Then there came a voice...brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking. (Ezekiel 1:3-28)

The Prophet Isaiah had visions of the glory of God filling the earth, radiating the Presence of Yahweh through sound and light vibrations. Isaiah mediated the divine judgments against the false teachers and rulers of his day, who were spiritually ‘blind and deaf’ and sought to prevent the people from attaining spiritual development.



Prayer and Meditation

We also find in ancient Judaism that Moses emphasized the significance of hearing God. He gave the Israelites a *mantra* which is called the *Shema* from the Hebrew word ‘to listen’. This is the primary creedal statement in Biblical Judaism (and in Rabbinic Judaism even today):

Hear, O Israel! The LORD our God is One.

Moses also taught the people to meditate as a way of life in every action and intention, and to love God with a focused inner being (heart, mind, strength).

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words... shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. (Deuteronomy 6:4-7)

Historical Changes in Judaism

As happens over the course of history in all places, these ideals and expectations had to be modified and re-interpreted in response to life. The needs of the common people shape their



traditions, even as those in power choose the issues. By the time of the centuries preceding the birth of Jesus, the Jewish people were splintered into many factions and lived in geographically isolated groups. There was no central political leadership within Judaism after the Babylonian Captivity of 586 B.C.E. The land was occupied by a series of foreign powers, and the influences of multiple religious beliefs and practices led to divisions along lines of traditions ranging from magical superstition to legalistic obedience.

As we move closer to the time that Jesus was born to a Jewish family in Israel, we see an increasing prevalence among the common people to participate in practices of black magic and witchcraft, and to be influenced by false teachers and their false doctrines about sacrifices and strict laws of purification. Corrupt living and immorality became the norm among some of the Jewish sects.

During this time, paradoxically, there also emerged other Jewish groups which emphasized extreme moral codes and almost obsessive outward conformity to the avoidance of any sign of sin. In the more legalistic sects, the Sabbath⁷ was considered so holy that anyone who did any work on that day, even collecting wood for fuel, could be sentenced to death. In other sects of the



time, the slaughter of hundreds of animals to be placed in the sacrificial fire was an important and holy element of religious practice. In the beliefs of some of the people, obedience to ancient rituals of animal sacrifice and the prescribed application of animal blood were essential to righteousness and worship.

The Wisdom Tradition

In the years when early Judaism was struggling to prevail in Israel, the religious systems of other world cultures were also undergoing transformations.⁸ In India, the ancient religions were being greatly influenced by the light of the teachings of both the Buddha and his contemporary, Lord Mahavira of the Jain tradition. In China, the wisdom of both Lao Tzu and Confucius were being spread. These great sages taught many similar themes, such as questioning the role of rituals in the inner journey, turning inward to seek the divine, and seeking social justice.

In Judaism, there was also a surge of spirituality as a new wave of prophets declared their messages across the land of Palestine. A renewed body of literature was emerging which came to be known as *Hochmah* (Hebrew for Wisdom) literature. In these writings many spiritual truths were expounded.



This Wisdom tradition within Judaism resonated with the teachings that were emerging in the other religions of the world at this time. The new thinking grew out of understanding that the whole universe operated according to divine law. One of the major principles of the way of Wisdom in all religious traditions is that a life of moral rectitude is better than one of merely conforming to ritual. A central tenet is that ‘a man reaps what he sows,’ a principle known as *karma* in the Indian traditions. A corollary of this teaches that it is better to remain poor than to become rich by oppressing others.

In Judaism this divine law is sometimes referred to as the Word (*Logos* in Greek; *Memra* in Hebrew) and the Teaching (*Torah* in Hebrew). In the Jewish Scriptures of the early Christian era this divine law is spoken of as the Way⁹ (*Derekh* in Hebrew). The inner kernel of the teaching is about the intentions of the heart and mind. Some of the most revered Jewish scholars and prophets of this time also claimed that the soul existed before this life, and taught that the soul came from God and would return to God.



The Essenes and Other Sects of Judaism

In Egypt and Palestine, sometime before the advent of Christ, there had come into existence a community of ascetics known as the Essenes.¹⁰ The Essenes can be understood in light of the Indian concept of a forest dweller, although the Essenes dwelt in desert lands near the Dead Sea. The term may have derived from a word that means holy, pious, or one who is silent. The Essenes are said to have set themselves apart from the commonly accepted religious boundaries of Jewish tradition. They saw the path of nonviolence as the correct way, and accordingly practiced vegetarianism. They were very disciplined in their daily activities, and worked hard for their sustenance. They lived communally and freely shared all food and material possessions. After performing their work, the Essenes spent their time in meditation and other spiritual practices which sought union with God. In these ways, the lifestyle of this sect was similar to the followers of the Buddha. Their written records indicate a belief in the immortality of the soul and the karmic principle.

During this same time period before Jesus many great scholars and social reformers were born in Palestine and Egypt. They studied the philosophical and spiritual texts of China, India,



Greece and Persia, and sought to reform the traditions of Judaism. One of these teachers was the son of Sirach, surnamed Jesus (a common name in this era). He spoke of God's omniscience and of the importance of a virtuous life of moral integrity. Ben (Hebrew for 'son of') Sirach taught that a life of virtue is characterized by compassion and is expressed through good deeds. Another contemporary Jewish reformer was the sage Hillel. He reminded the people of one of the central tenets of their ancient tradition, because they seemed to have forgotten it:

Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you.

He also objected to the empty rituals of the priests. One of the greatest Jewish scholars of this period was Philo.¹¹ He lived in Alexandria, a center of Jewish life in Egypt. He studied Indian and Greek philosophy and wrote many volumes in which he interpreted these ideas in the context of Jewish thought. One of his most significant contributions is his treatise "On the contemplative life" in which he explicitly makes the case for moral integrity and its importance in leading a spiritual life.

Although there were so many reformers speaking out during these centuries of turmoil in Judaism, they were unable to significantly influence the common people or gain much support.



The Jewish people at this time were very fragmented socially and politically, as well as geographically. Israel was an occupied territory of the Greek and then Roman Empires. There was no legitimate King of the Jews, and there had not been one for a very long time. Government officials were appointed by the foreign powers, and even the priesthood of the Temple (which had been rebuilt in Jerusalem) was subject to manipulation by the powers in control.

Some of the dominant sects of Judaism at this time still insisted on old forms of ritual worship involving animal sacrifices. One of the most popular of these was based on the teachings of Shammai.¹² He was opposed to the reformers, and sought to suppress any signs of spiritual awakening or new thinking. His influence served to sustain the traditional ways of ritual worship.

At this time there also arose a great seeker of God named John. He was destined to have a significant role in the unfolding religious drama. John seems to have been deeply influenced by the Essenes as well as by Indian thought. He preached non violence and self control and lived a life of ascetic discipline near the Jordan River, outside of Jerusalem. Before instructing a spiritual seeker, John asked that they immerse in the waters of the river. This same custom is prevalent in India, where aspirants



are required to purify themselves before the spiritual initiation. The initiation by John has come to be known as baptism, meaning “to immerse in the water.” The rite of baptism derives from the traditional practice of ritual cleansing (*mikveh*) that was customary in many of the sects of Judaism. This ritual cleansing was a regular practice in the Essene communities and is recorded in many of their documents.

John proclaimed that the Kingdom God had promised, is the Kingdom of Heaven within you, and is available to the spiritual seeker. He explained to his followers that they would continue to suffer until they found this heavenly kingdom within. John taught that discipline of the senses was important, and he also modeled the practices of fasting and prayer. He taught that justice and moral rectitude were essentials of the true path of religion (*dharmā*). He spoke to the people about the ways of true reform and the attainment of salvation.

The Descent of Lord Jesus

Jesus is considered to be the founder of Christianity. Jesus was born in a Jewish family and his teaching evolved out of Judaism.¹³



It is not known exactly when Jesus was born, but it is believed that it was between 4 B.C. and 6 C.E. As we have seen, the land of Israel was occupied by the Roman Empire at that time. The local Roman administrator for the Jews was Herod. The legends that have been told about the birth of Jesus speak about his mother Mary, who is said to have been born in the village of Nazareth. Mary was engaged to Joseph, who was a common carpenter. It is believed that Mary became pregnant before the marriage and that this was solely by the grace of God acting through His Spirit. It is central to the legend to the birth of Jesus that Mary was nonetheless still a virgin when she became pregnant. In the story, Joseph was divinely inspired and proceeded to marry Mary because he understood the divine origin of her pregnancy. During the later months of the pregnancy, it is told that Mary and Joseph traveled to the southern district of Judea in order to be counted in a census. When the couple arrived in the town of Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to the baby Jesus.

The Childhood of Jesus

Little is documented about the early years of the life of Jesus, but we can imagine the lifestyle of this family. Joseph was a carpenter by trade and Mary took care of the household. We can



picture that Mary used to weave. The family perhaps lived in a small house where they carried out the typical daily routine of an average Jewish life in a village. It is also possible that Mary and Joseph taught the boy Jesus how to read and write. We can imagine as the boy grew older he perhaps attended services with his father at a local Jewish synagogue,¹⁴ and likely would have had some religious education. As the eldest son, Jesus would have looked after his younger brothers and sisters and also helped with the household tasks. From his earliest childhood Jesus was compassionate and always treated others with kindness. As Jesus grew older he would have learned the trade of carpentry from his father. It is thought by some that Jesus was a carpenter in Nazareth until the age of 30 when his public ministry began. We will discuss this again later and see some other possibilities of what Jesus did during those years.

From the tales that have been preserved in the traditions, it seems that all who knew Jesus in these early years were amazed by his truthfulness and honesty. In one of the historical records we are told that at the age of 12 Jesus went to Jerusalem with his parents to celebrate the Jewish festivals at the Temple. During this visit to Jerusalem Jesus was greatly affected by seeing the priestly rituals of animals being sacrificed. We can imagine that he would have been curious about the religious meaning of all the



activity, the loud screams of the countless animals that were being slaughtered, and the overwhelming smell and gore involved in the ritual use of the animal blood. According to the legend, his mind was cast into doubt concerning the merit of what he saw. The actual record of this episode does not include any details about the thoughts of Jesus on this occasion.

During the first century A.D. the major religious schools of Judaism were in Jerusalem. This is where the great Rabbis held public debates, proclaimed their interpretations of the scriptures, and educated students in their traditions of Judaism. A story is related in the gospels that on the occasion of a family visit to Jerusalem with his parents, when Jesus was 12 years old, he became involved in discussions with the Rabbis. While his parents were occupied with adult involvement in rituals and prayer, the young boy Jesus was pursuing spiritual understanding. Many days passed in this way as they were visiting Jerusalem. On their return home to Nazareth, the parents discovered that Jesus had not returned with their group. They immediately returned Jerusalem to find him. After searching for their son for three days they found him questioning and debating with the learned rabbis.



This story tells us that even as a boy of 12, Jesus was very resolved and sincere in his desire to know the nature of the Divine, and had an intense interest in studying with the Jewish teachers. It would be natural to assume that this desire to learn about Truth continued to grow. The scriptural record and legendary tales have no further information about the life of Jesus from the age of 12 until his baptism by John when Jesus was about the age of 30.

The Search for Truth

It seems that Jesus was by nature a keen observer of the social practices, and also had an interest in the religious teachings that set the tone of life in rural Israel. In general, the common Jewish people were oppressed by the domination of the Roman rulers, as well as by the false teachings and rigid standards of righteousness imposed on them by the priesthood in Judea. Jesus was a contemplative person. He pondered deeply the web spun by the priests declaring the requirements for animal sacrifice and the laws for personal purification. It seems that his thoughts and observations of the social conditions Jesus to help people out of this bleak situation. Attentively, he served others. Although, he could have lived the life of a householder, as was



typical for his day and age, he instead chose a life of social and spiritual service.

Many contradictions and ambiguities within the religious traditions of the time, which earlier prophets had noticed, were also noted by Jesus. For example, the Hebrew Scriptures contain multiple references to detailed requirements about the slaughter of animals for sacrifice. But there are also numerous declarations by the prophets that God desires compassion, and in fact prefers this to animal sacrifice.

God prefers love and compassion:

I desire compassion not sacrifice. I prefer the path of contemplation of God rather than the sacrifice of innocent animals. However, the people transgressed these true teachings of God just as Adam transgressed the command of God. They have distorted the teachings.

In the book of the Prophet Isaiah it is written:

God says: "You sacrifice many animals in My name. What is the use of killing these goats and lambs? Upon their slaughter I do not become pleased. I hate the smell of the sacrificial fire. Stop doing evil and learn to do good."

However, the *Hebrew Bible*, just as the texts of the Vedanta and other traditions, contains contradictory ideas. For example, there is a frequently quoted verse from the *Torah* which says 'an eye



for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ Unfortunately, this has often been interpreted out of context, and with retribution in mind.¹⁵ But even in Jesus’ time it was apparent that there were other verses of the Torah taught that people should not seek revenge. The underlying principle is that God always desires the welfare of all creatures.

We must keep in mind when studying the teachings of the religious leaders—prophets, saints, and mystics—do not search for ‘new’ truth. Rather, what they do is to simply remove the layers of dirt of accumulated misinterpretations that have corrupted the truth. The saints and prophets interpret the same eternal truth in a new light for their cultural context. The original truth must repeatedly be presented anew to suit the current age. Jesus faced two challenges. First, he would have to extricate the truth buried inside the fabricated norms of the prevalent tradition. Second, teaching the path of inner realization that is attained through self-control.

In the gospel stories we see that Jesus felt a desire to have the association of a true teacher. He had heard about the ministry and teaching of John¹⁶ who was teaching and baptizing people at the banks of the Jordan River for the remission of their sins. Jesus approached John in his hut in the wilderness. He felt very



peaceful after listening to John's teachings and he desired to have John as his spiritual mentor. According to tradition, John took Jesus by his hand and immersed him in the water of the River Jordan. This baptism was the way of initiation into the teaching.

After his initiation, Jesus sought the quiet of the wilderness and spent time there in meditation and prayer. He fasted on one occasion for forty days. A story is told in the gospels about all the temptations that Jesus had to conquer within himself. He overcame all. Jesus attained a great spiritual awakening and his inner spiritual eye was opened. In some traditions it is said that Jesus also practiced the meditation of the divine inner sound.

Jesus is reported to have said:

See the door to heaven has been opened. The first sound I have heard was of such a nature that it sounds like a trumpet talking to me. It said, "Come this way. I will show you things ahead".

According the legend, Jesus further describes the inner experience:

I was in my soul (I left my body and came into the sound) and I heard the deep sound of the trumpet.

It would seem that at this point Jesus perhaps realized that the goal of his life was to teach the true path of liberation of the soul to the suffering people of his own country. He continued to go



to the wilderness and spend time in prayer and contemplation. John was very pleased with the spiritual progress and moral conduct of his disciple, Jesus.

During the years of John's ministry, the political situation in Galilee, a northern province of Israel, continued to deteriorate. Herod Antipas had been appointed to rule by the Roman government. He was a morally decadent individual who abandoned his wife in order to marry his brother's wife. John raised his voice against this moral outrage. When Herod heard about this public criticism of his private affairs he became greatly angered and had John imprisoned. John maintained his position and was unremorseful. Herod simply had John beheaded. In the gospel tale about this incident it is reported that Herod then paraded the head of John on a platter at one of his parties. Many Christians regard John as the first martyr of Christianity.

When Jesus heard of John's demise he became very saddened and retreated to seclusion in the wilderness for prayer and contemplation. Afterwards he began traveling from place to place teaching the message of John. From a common way of understanding this story, this was the beginning of Christianity.



Jesus' ministry mostly took place in the northern districts of Israel, around the village of Capernaum and the city of Tiberius. There were many people in this region that followed Jesus even from among the Gentiles.¹⁷ Jesus lived a humble and disciplined life. He wore simple clothing, walked barefoot, and slept under the starry sky. He rejected the comforts of an easy life of wealth and status, and instead embraced the lifestyle and fellowship of the people in the villages. Jesus regarded the life of non-attachment as a great virtue, and had meager possessions. He pursued the way of non-violence, and found that hurting anyone's heart was impossible for him. He was a living example of the axiom: 'Hate the sin but love the sinner.'

Jesus lived the life of his ideals, much like a Vedic *sadhu* or Buddhist *bhikshu* (monk). He was often considered to be a fool, or even worse, a nonbeliever. Frequently, he was flatly rejected by some of the Jews, and some even threw stones at him. He was evicted from several towns. Nevertheless, his actions and teachings had a great impact on the common people. He regularly healed people of their illnesses, depressions and superstitions, and was available to all who earnestly sought salvation from God. For this reason many people began to think of Jesus as the *Messiah*, calling him the Prophet and the Deliverer. The title '*Messiah*'¹⁸ literally means 'anointed One,'



and derives from the tradition of pouring oil over the body of a king or other personage being honored and inaugurated into office. The title always referred to a person who was recognized as the divinely appointed king or messenger of God's will. The title 'Christ' (*christos* in Greek) is commonly assumed to be the Greek translation of the Hebrew (Jewish) term *Messiah*.¹⁹

Jesus had a special love for the poor and for those who were suffering illness or injustice. He mingled and ate with them and taught them the path to peace and light. He healed many sick people with the power of his purity. He was kindhearted while at the same time he was able to stay detached. He used to refer to himself as the son of God and the giver of liberation to the world. Even so, he remained profoundly humble. Jesus loved God with all his heart and mind, and often spent entire nights in prayer and meditation.

Jesus spoke of the town of Capernaum as his very own. It was a town of illiterate fishermen. Many of the families from this village were his devotees. Simon and Andrew, two brothers who were devout followers, lived in Capernaum. Simon is the disciple who was later known as Peter. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, lived nearby. These followers from this small town were instrumental in spreading the message about Jesus and his



teachings in all directions. It is believed by many that Peter, James, and John received esoteric teachings from Jesus. Some think this private instruction from the Master was about the practice of inner meditation. Some even suggest that Jesus was quite familiar with Indian teachings of non-dualism as well as the Greek philosophy of the time.

The Teachings of Jesus Christ

The teachings of Jesus are universal in nature. Jesus taught many principles that are very similar to the Indian concepts presented in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, *Vedanta* texts, and also in the teachings of the Buddha. For example, people often asked Jesus how the ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ would be established.

An Indian author, Sundarlal, elaborates on the teachings of Jesus:

First of all, man should know that humans and God are essentially one. The duality which we perceive is due to the veil of love for the world which creates this illusion of separation from True knowledge (unity of God and humans). The world as we perceive it is not real and it is a deception. God is ever living, eternal and is the truth. To remove this veil of ignorance, one must be detached from this world and should strive for the new life. One should develop control of the mind and learn from within how to discriminate between the truth and non-truth. One should ask for help from one who knows the path. This is the way to find unity with



God. One must understand that I am in all and all are in Me. All is God and God is in everyone. The all and God are one. The cosmic Soul participates in the [Kingdom of] heaven of God. This is the goal of human life, this is heaven, and this is liberation.

The principle teachings of Jesus [the Christ] are as follows:

1. Know the commandments of the Hebrew Scriptures: Do not kill (do not hurt anyone), do not steal, do not be a false witness, do not deceive, and honor your parents.
2. Love your enemies. Bless those who curse you.
3. If anyone shows animosity to you or inflicts injury on you, you should pray for their well being.
4. Do not take the life of another. He who takes the life of another is sure to be punished by God.
5. Do not commit adultery. But even if you look on another with lustful eyes, you have already committed adultery in your heart.
6. Beware of false prophets. They appear as sheep but inwardly they are fierce wolves.
7. Whoever tries to save one's own life will lose it. The one who sacrifices his life for the sake of my teachings will gain life. If a man loses his soul, even if he has gained the whole world, what is the use?



8. Do not hoard wealth in this world where worms and decay will destroy it. Instead collect your wealth in heaven where it will not decay or become tarnished and where thieves will not steal it.
9. Do not perform spiritual practices in a way which shows pride or arrogance. If one disregards this advice, no spiritual benefit will be given from the heavenly Father.
10. If a man says: “Lord, Lord” he will not necessarily enter into the kingdom of heaven. The person who will enter the kingdom of heaven is the one who acts according to the will of the heavenly Father.
11. If you truly desire something and ask for it, it will be granted. When you seek you shall find, when you knock it shall be opened to you.
12. Enter through the narrow gate, because the path and the gate which is broad and easy is the path to destruction. Many take this path. However, the narrow and difficult gate takes you to life. There are very few who walk on this path.
13. The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye becomes one then your whole body will be filled with light. If your eye is evil then your whole body will be filled with darkness. If the light which is in you is covered, how



great is that darkness! It is so, because the light which is in you, although covered or obscured, is greater.

14. In the beginning there was the Word and the Word was with God and God was the Word.

15. All has been created by the Word and without the Word nothing could be created.

16. In that Word there was life, and that life was the light of people's lives.

The Teachings of Jesus Christ and Santmat

From this review of the main teachings of Jesus it becomes clear that Jesus gave guidelines for moral as well as practical living. At the same time, he taught the inner mystical path for attaining unity with the Divine, similar to the path taught by various mystics, saints and prophets.

The Saints tell us that in our inner self reside the brilliance of the Divine manifested in the form the Divine Light and the Divine Sound. According to Santmat tradition, through spiritual practice, the seeker will experience both light and sound, which represent the Divine glory and the Divine Word. Through that Word the aspirant reaches God. The spiritual practice of focusing is known as *Driṣṭi yoga*. It involves bringing the vision of the



two eyes to one point of focus. The practitioner is, then, able to go through the ‘narrow gate’ (called the tenth gate, the third eye, or the *ajna charka*). At this point the practitioner comes out of the darkness and becomes established in light. Then through the technique of Sound *Yoga* the practitioner is able to hear many sounds, but then, leaving these sounds behind, the practitioner reaches the original sound (the Word). Through this Word all of creation came into existence and is maintained. At this point the *yogi* (the practitioner) merges with that Word and becomes one with God. Meeting with God, the person realizes the essential unity of soul and God. With this insight, all suffering ends. This is the “Kingdom of Heaven” which Jesus frequently refers to.

The teachings of Jesus and his followers correspond closely with the practices of Santmat. From the point of view of the teachings of Santmat, through the inner meditation practices Jesus entered the Kingdom of God. This is the path by which Jesus merged with the divine, thus becoming a son of God.

The New Testament records numerous teachings about the Divine Light:

*In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.
John 1:4)*

*He was transfigured before them, and His face shone
like the sun, and His garments became as white as
light. (Matthew 17:2)*



He [John] came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. (John 1:7)

There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. (John 1:9)

I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life. (John 8:11-13)

I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light. (Acts 26:18)

In whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

For God, who said "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6)

... giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. (Colossians 1:12)

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. (James 1:17)

The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who



loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. (1 John 2:9-10)

And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them. (Revelation 22:5)

There are many other ways in which teachings of Jesus are similar to Indian saints and *mahatmas* (great souls). For example, Jesus emphasized the practice of *brahmacharya* (celibacy) for the serious seekers of the Truth. Indian sages often recommend a life of a life of pure moral purity, including sexual purity, for the seekers of the Divine. It is generally believed that the early disciples of Jesus refrained from the married life.

Another similarity is that Jesus did not desire to display the inner powers that were the source of his miracles. The Saints in the Santmat tradition generally desist the show of miraculous powers. Often Jesus was often challenged about the healings he performed, and he always responded by direction attention to 'His Father in Heaven', the true source for healing. However, beyond the clarity of his humility, it is certainly understood that his compassion is what made many sick people well.

It is also of importance to note that Jesus believed in life after the death of the physical body, just as is taught in the Vedic Way.



All of these traditions and stories were preserved after the death of Jesus. It has been thought by some that Matthew was the most learned among the first disciples. It is likely that Matthew would have treasured the memories of his Master's teachings, and it is thought that he became a spiritual teacher himself in order to transmit these teachings to other believers. The community that developed around Matthew's teaching preserved the stories he told about Jesus. These have been collected and recorded, and have come to be known as the Gospel of Matthew. There are many other versions of these Gospel stories that have been recorded. They were orally transmitted in the first decades, and some were written down and passed on through generations.

Jesus Travels to the Indian Subcontinent

Although there are many written stories and records, there are no known documented accounts of the life of Jesus between the ages of 12 and 30. There is a lack of any clear, systematic and sequential records from these years. But, there are many followers of Jesus, who are willing to consider new theories and possibilities concerning the life of Jesus. A prominent Russian scholar named Dr. Nicolai Notovich has been investigating these lost years of Jesus.



Dr. Notovich spent forty years doing research in the Middle East as well as in Europe. He has studied hundreds of temples, libraries, and ancient manuscripts that have been found throughout these lands. Dr. Notovich discovered some long abandoned records in a small monastery in the Angadys desert. These manuscripts indicate that when Jesus was 14 years of age he embarked on a journey which led him to Tibet and later to India.

While Dr. Notovich was searching inside a monastery called Hemis in Ladakh, he found a handwritten scroll in the ancient Pali language. In this text there is a detailed and lengthy description of Jesus' travels to Tibet and India. This account has since been published as "The Unknown Life of Jesus." The following story is an example of what is recorded in this manuscript:

When Jesus became the age of 13, his marriage negotiations began to be discussed. Jesus desirous of leading a life wholly dedicated to God decided to leave his home rather than be bound by marriage. Accordingly, he left his home as a seeker of Truth. He desired to learn about Buddha dharma. Joining a trader's caravan he first came to Sindh and later to (now what is known as) India. In India he stayed among many of the Jain teachers. He visited Jagannath, a pilgrimage place in India. For six years he journeyed to Rajgraha, Kapilvastu, Benares and many other pilgrimage places. He also studied the



Buddhist tradition from the monks of the day. Finally, through Nepal he went to Iran and thereafter returned to Israel. He then began teaching the life of truth, love, and non-violence.

(The above account is the abbreviated version of the 18 missing years in the life of Jesus.)

Many people are skeptical about this alternate account, and find it very hard to believe that it is based on facts. However, if we closely examine what Jesus actually taught, and think about this teachings apart from the conventional traditions that later developed, we can see that his teaching was of a very different nature from the other teachings of his time. It appears that Jesus taught a path which is universal in nature, and also corresponds closely to the teachings of Buddhism and Indian thought. The theory that Jesus may have traveled outside of Israel and may have experienced other religious teachings has some appeal when viewed in this light. Perhaps, there is more to consider. The traditional interpretations based on the accepted sources may not have the only claim to credibility. It is beyond the scope of this work, but it must be suggested that a more intensive analysis of this correlation would be most compelling.



Rising Voices of Mutiny

It would not be unfair to say that the teachings and methods of Jesus were like a revolution within the prevalent traditions of Judaism. Moreover, many of the common people of his time were dissatisfied with the rigid practices and dogma of some of the religious leaders in Jerusalem. Many were disgruntled by the injustices of a system that seemed to have become corrupt. There was great resentment toward some of the rabbis and scholars who paraded their righteousness in front of others, and claimed that outer conformity to their interpretation of the purity laws was of greater value than the attitude of a person's heart.

To be certain, the teachings of Jesus, which contained messages of love, peace and equality, were greatly savored by the common man. However, the Roman rulers and some of the Jewish priests found many of these teachings to be too threatening to their own selfish ends. For this reason, they viewed Jesus as the rival.

Jesus himself was repelled by the arrogance he saw in many of his fellow Jews. He was pained by the greed and materialism that had come to pervade the ritualistic sacrificial system of the Temple, and he was deeply offended by the practices of animal slaughter that had come to define worship. He publicly



confronted the priests at the temple during the time when multitudes of people had come there to celebrate the holy festivals. He interrupted the activities of the money changers and those who were selling the animals for the sacrifices, and accused the priesthood of turning the house of God into a den of thieves. This could have caused some of the worshippers to become disillusioned, and might have even resulted in loss of income for some. The pride, ego and arrogance of the priests, along with their corrupted and materialistic system, had been delivered a significant blow.

The Jewish religion before the Christian era was fundamentally an ethno-national entity grounded in the land of Israel. The worship structure was not thought of as a 'path to God' in the way that we today might think of spirituality. Rather, the priesthood and temple rituals were a surviving remnant of the ancient cultic expression of a people who already considered themselves to have been chosen by God. The sacrificial system was viewed from within Judaism as a response of obedience, and understood to be the only means of making atonement for the sins of the people who were already members of a relationship bound by covenant. Worship was essentially mediated through the priestly functions, fairly similar to the ancient Indian *Brahminical* system of ritual and sacrifice.



These religious premises did not fit well with the social conditions that had unfolded in the thousand years of historical complications since the era of the founding of the monarchy. Nor were these early layers of religion meeting the spiritual needs of a people in crisis. Ancient Biblical Judaism had been formulated during the generation of Moses and the exodus. The religious system had then assimilated the responses that arose to meet the challenges of forging an identity and a loyalty within an emerging political and social entity. By the first century of the new era, the ancient religion had been stretched to a breaking point.

The message that Jesus was proclaiming showed the people that God is everywhere, in everyone, and is the life of everyone. The revolutionary core of his teaching claimed that a true worshipper could worship God within himself. The Kingdom of Heaven is in the core of every heart. This worship would be worship of the Truth. Further, Jesus proclaimed that all good people are able to attain God—even sinners, prostitutes, and people who were not even Jewish. He openly taught and associate with the people from all walks of life—higher and lower; rich and poor.

These subversive ideas were intolerable to the orthodox Jewish leadership. In their legalistic adherence to the ancient commands



of Scripture, they were fixed on the external level of the appearance of behavior. From this legalistic perspective, the Sabbath was a holy day, and on it all work was prohibited and was therefore automatically judged to be sinful. According to some of the strict interpretations, it was even considered unlawful to show mercy and caring for the sick on the Sabbath. But at the same time, the orthodox understanding of the Law deemed animal sacrifice at the Temple to be acceptable at this day. Jesus spoke out strongly against this hypocrisy, and thus threatened and enraged the leaders of the Jewish Temple.

Furthermore, Jesus committed the ultimate blasphemy by referring to himself as the son of God, when these words were taken out of context and understood from a literalistic and legalistic mindset. To many of the Jewish leaders this was high heresy. All of these attitudes, and suspicions combined together to trigger an uproar among the orthodox people.

The Evening of Life

There were many people who were jealous of Jesus' popularity with the masses. At the time of the Passover²⁰ holiday, according to the custom, Jews from all over Israel, and even from the nearby lands of the *diaspora* (dispersion), gathered in



Jerusalem to celebrate. Although the ministry of Jesus had primarily taken place in the northern regions of the Galilee, on this particular Passover he and his disciples had come to the Temple in Jerusalem.

Multitudes of Jews, therefore, heard about the teachings of this itinerant rabbi Jesus from Nazareth, who was said to preach with authority. The stories of his message, rumors about the miracles he performed, and tales about his own personal example had various effects on people. Many were intrigued. Revolutionary possibilities filled the air in the crowded city. Civil unrest and dissension among the crowds was further aroused by a diverse group of rebels, political activists, and prophets, each with an appealing solution to the misery and chaos. The social fabric of Jewish society was pulling at the seams. All of this was taking place under the military occupation of a puppet government. The Jewish ruling class was itself also subject to this foreign authority. Peace and survival were the desires of all.

There were many who were threatened by the teachings and personal example of Jesus' life as he did not observe the Jewish laws and customs. They labeled him a traitor to the Jewish religion. It was the custom for the leaders of the priests to convene²¹ to discuss political and religious situations. They



gathered together to evaluate their options in responding to the mounting crisis in Jerusalem. It sounded to them as if Jesus was claiming to be the Son of God. In addition to sounding like religious blasphemy to their ears this term also had political²² implications: the term ‘Son of God,’ the “Anointed One,” evoked images of the legitimate King appointed by God to rule Israel. So the council determined that Jesus should be eliminated. However, they realized that Jesus had many followers among the people and considered that a revolt could arise if they killed him outright.

The New Testament records²³ the inner workings of the plan they devised. They manipulated Judas, a close disciple of Jesus, by contriving to pay him thirty pieces of silver in exchange for his identification of Jesus to the authorities. The betrayal was to be enacted by Judas placing a kiss on Jesus. Thus the priests involved the Roman soldiers in the capture of Jesus, and had Jesus brought as a prisoner to be judged by the Roman Governor. As the plot unfolded, Jesus had to endure a night of physical and mental torture at the hands of the Roman soldiers. Then in the morning he was brought before the Roman court to be tried by the governor, Pilate.



At this trial the Jewish priests accused Jesus of many wrong doings and presented many false witnesses. Even so, after Pilate, heard all their testimony he declared that he found no guilt in Jesus. The priests however aggressively pressed their demand for a death sentence. Pilate considered Jesus to be without sin but was nevertheless concerned that an out-and-out riot might occur if he released Jesus, and so he yielded to the desires of the accusers.

Jesus was condemned to hang on a cross until death. It was the custom to allow the condemned to have a great amount of alcohol prior to execution to alleviate some of the pain. Jesus refused this sedative, and the Roman soldiers proceeded to nail him to a wooden cross. Jesus cried out from the cross:

*O Lord, why have You forsaken me? Please forgive
These people; they don't know what they are doing.*

The compassionate Jesus forgave his tormentors even as he was dying on the cross.

The New Testament Gospels offer details about the day of the execution. It is said in these stories that when the soul of Jesus left his body the skies darkened and the earth quaked. At this same moment, the forty foot curtain partition that prevented the



common people from entering the inner sanctum of the Temple was miraculously split down the middle.²⁴

In some traditions these events took place on Friday, April 3rd, 29 C.E. It is believed that the body of Jesus was buried in a tomb, but on the third he became alive again. The New Testament tells that the Risen Jesus remained with his close disciples for forty days, disclosing a deeper spiritual knowledge to them. He then ascended to heaven in their sight.²⁵

A Hymn of Thanksgiving

*Give thanks to the Lord,
Because he is good, his love is eternal.
Give thanks to the greatest of all goods; his love is
eternal.
Give thanks to the mightiest of all lords; his love is
eternal.
He alone performs miracles; his love is eternal.
By his wisdom he made the heavens; his love is eternal.
He made the sun and the moon; his love is eternal.
The sun to rule over the day; his love is eternal.
He gives food to every living creatures; his love is
eternal.
Give thanks to the God of heaven; his love is eternal.
(Psalm 136: 1-9, 25-26)*



¹ Biblical Judaism is to be distinguished from other commonly known designations of Judaism, such as ‘the religion of the Jews,’ Rabbinic Judaism, and *Kabbalah*. Each of these stems from a different point in the rich history of development of this religion. Biblical Judaism is based on the *Torah* of the Hebrew Scriptures, traditionally attributed to Moses. This is the primary source for the religious and historical roots of the Christian religion, before there was a ‘Christ’. The significance of the ‘*Messianic* expectation’ only emerges in the context of the interpretations and traditions of Biblical Judaism.

² The term ‘Middle East’ is used in various ways in different contexts, but generally refers to the geographical area of the Near East or Southwest Asia. From the perspective of India, the Middle East is thought of as Western Asia.

³ According to Jewish tradition and scripture ‘Israel’ is the name given by God to the patriarch Jacob. In this tradition, God identified Jacob as the chosen son of Abraham who would inherit the Promised Land of Canaan. When the descendants of Abraham conquered and took possession of this land, it came to be called Israel. The same geographical area is also referred to as Palestine from alternate political and historical points of view.

⁴ The terms ‘Jew’ and ‘Jewish’ are of recent construction. Most often these terms are used anachronistically, reading back into history through Christianized and modern categories. The words derive from the tribal and territorial name Judah, one of the twelve sons of Jacob (Israel). In the time of Jesus’ ministry, the first century C.E., the Temple, the priesthood, the religious rulers and the scholars were centered in Jerusalem, which was in the region of Judea. It was common practice for Israelites who lived in other districts (and even other countries) to refer to the leaders and teachers of the Temple-based religious system as the ‘Judeans’. Later, this term was translated outside of its original context as ‘the Jews’.

⁵ The Hebrew Bible is commonly called the Old Testament from a Christian perspective, which assumes that Christianity is the new and improved revelation known in the “New” Testament. The two collections of Scripture together are often referred to as “the Bible.”

⁶ The Hebrew Scriptures refer to the Supreme Deity as *YHWH*, the consonants of the Hebrew verb ‘to be,’ commonly pronounced *Yahweh*, or *Jehovah* in later transcriptions. Modern Jews often refer to God as *HaShem*, literally ‘the name’ in Hebrew. The name for the deity has been, and still is, a major religious issue in many branches of Judaism. Pronunciation of the name of God is forbidden by many, and is even considered blasphemous by some. In modern American Judaism it is unacceptable to write the English word, and the practice is to instead write ‘G-d’. It was common in ancient texts to substitute the holy name with less potent forms, such as *Adonai*, which means Lord or master. It is also common to refer to the deity by the attribute that is demonstrated in a Biblical narrative. There are hundreds of names that have been canonized.



⁷ The Sabbath, traditionally celebrated on Saturday, is a holy day set apart by divine decree in the earliest Scriptures. It is to be a day of rest dedicated to the worship of God.

⁸ Scholars of religious history refer to the fifth and sixth centuries B.C.E. as the Axial Age. At this time there seems to have been a spiritual awakening around the world. The spiritual teachers who emerged during this pivotal time are the founders of most of the major world religions that we know today.

⁹ This profound idea about the divine law (similar to *dharmā*) which acts from within all creation and consciousness, has often been greatly misunderstood by both by Jews themselves, and critics from outside of Judaism. It has been misinterpreted and caricatured as legalistic obedience to external laws (*nomos* in Greek) of righteousness.

¹⁰ The Essenes were a religious sect of Judaism that flourished from the second century B.C.E. to the first century C.E. in Qumran, a plateau in the Judean Desert along the Dead Sea. The origin of the name is debated, but may derive from the Greek word for holy, or from an Aramaic dialect term for pious. In their writings, the Essenes refer to themselves as the “Sons of Light”.

¹¹ The writings of Philo (20 B.C.E.-50 C.E.) are considered to be the most important surviving documents from the period of Hellenistic Judaism: *The divine Logos...is the helmsman and governor of the universe. The whole creation, this entire world perceived by our senses (seeing that it is greater than any human image) is a copy of the Divine Image. The incorporeal world then was already completed, having its seat in the Logos; and the world, perceptible by the external senses, was made on the model of it. The everlasting Logos of the eternal God is the very sure and staunch prop of the Whole. He it is, who extending himself from the midst to its utmost bounds and from its extremities to the midst again, keeps up though all its length Nature's unvanquished course, combining and compacting all its parts. For the Father Who begat Him constituted His Logos such a Bond of the Universe as none can break. But the shadow of God is his Word [Logos], which he used like an instrument when he was making the world. And this shadow, and, as it were, model, is the archetype of other things.*

¹² Shammai (c. 50 B.C.E. – 30 C.E.) was a Jewish sage known for his opposition to the spiritual teachings of Hillel. The school of Shammai interpreted the Law (*Torah* of Biblical Judaism) extremely rigorously. They emphasized the external behavior of deeds rather than the intent of the heart. The great debates between Hillel and Shammai are recorded in rabbinical texts.

¹³ All of the words and works that we now know of this Jewish prophet-teacher were originally oral traditions shared between various groups of Jews in the century when the Temple in Jerusalem was once again destroyed by a foreign



empire. Later these stories were collected and recorded and preserved in multiple versions which are now considered to be sacred history. The foundational stories about the life of Jesus (the gospels) are contained in the books of what has now come to be called the New Testament of the Bible. The spiritual ideas were at first molded into a new sect of the Jewish religion by Jewish interpreters and teachers, such as Paul, who revealed the meaning of the events as they had come to understand them after the death of the prophet.

¹⁴ The synagogues were small gathering places for Jews in the villages. Most of the people were not able to travel regularly to the central place of ritual worship at the Jerusalem Temple. The sacrificial cult did not take place on a local level. The synagogues were places where local sages, called rabbis, would teach and lead the people in prayer, singing, and worship.

¹⁵ Exodus 21:24 read in context shows an intention to limit vengeance. This verse is quoted by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount when he urges his followers to turn the other cheek when confronted by violence (Matthew 5:38-39). Christian interpretations often unwittingly criticize the intent of these words in the Hebrew Bible without understanding Biblical Judaism in its own context in a pre-Christian era. Mahatma Gandhi added another layer of response when he commented: “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth and the whole world would soon be blind and toothless.”

¹⁶ Several versions of the traditional stories indicate that John and Jesus were cousins.

¹⁷ From the Jewish perspective, all non-Jewish groups of people are known as Gentiles.

¹⁸ The term *Messiah* originated in the Near East where the kings were anointed with oil as part of the coronation ceremony. The title is found in several texts in the Hebrew Scriptures, both in the historical records of kings and in prophetic speeches. The Persian king Cyrus is called God’s Anointed when he is selected to be an instrument in God’s dealings with Israel.

¹⁹ The major distinctions in the underlying meanings of the terms *Messiah* and *Christ* reflect deep and complicated issues that reach beyond the purposes of the present discussion.

²⁰ The Passover was a feast memorializing the escape from slavery in Egypt. It required the sacrifice of a perfect male lamb whose blood was then applied to the doorpost of the house to identify the faithful family..

²¹ The council was called the Sanhedrin. See Acts 5:34-39 for a sample of the record in the New Testament.

²² The Jewish council reasoned that if Jesus was also inferring that he was the expected deliverer, the Prophet like Moses whose appearance had been prophesied, then it would be expedient, and righteous for these leaders of Israel to pronounce their judgment by condemning Jesus to death. It is even recorded



in the historical text in the book of Acts that one of the priests observed that it would be a good idea to sacrifice one man rather than the whole nation.

²³ For further details see the versions of the gospel stories about the arrest of Jesus, the trials Jesus endured, his sentencing and the crucifixion, found in these chapters in the gospels: Matthew 26 and 27; Mark 14 and 15; Luke 22 and 23; John 18 and 19. A good summary can be viewed in Luke 22:47 – 24:53.

²⁴ The significance of this curtain lies in its symbolic role as the Veil which separates the people from the Holy of Holies. In ancient Biblical Judaism, only the High Priest was ever permitted to enter into this most sacred place. For details see for example Luke 23:44-46.

²⁵ See for example Luke 24:1-53; Acts 1:1-10.

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Chapter Five

Islam





Islam

Vedic religion, Christianity, and Islam combined, comprise a significant number of followers in the world. Of these three, the Vedic Dharma is the oldest, followed by Christianity and then the Islamic tradition. The word ‘Islam’ is derived from the Arabic word root *s-l-m*, meaning ‘to submission or surrender’, and specifically, to surrender to the will of God. Thus, in the Islamic tradition, the one who has surrendered to God (Allah) is called a Muslim, meaning ‘one who has surrendered.’ The prophet Muhammad, the messenger of God in this tradition, taught the importance of discipline and obedience. Humility is a principal virtue of Islam.

The Arab World at the Time of the Birth of Muhammad

Prophet Muhammad was born in the sixth century C.E. (approximately 1440 years ago). At that time, the Arab world was in great turmoil. There was social and religious upheaval, and the community was divided into many factions. The nomadic tribes and aboriginal peoples of the Arab region had diverse objects of worship, including the heavens, ghosts, spirits and stones, as well as other inanimate idols. There were many



Jewish communities in the Arab world, and the Jewish traditions were widely practiced in these communities. With so many options for worship, the people were not united under the canopy of any single religious belief system. Moral values were declining and social anarchy was at a zenith. Worship, sacrifice and prayers were performed either out of ignorance, habit, or to justify and gratify the individual ego. Prayer and sacrifice were often aimed at extorting or humiliating other individuals or groups. Social vices such as the use of intoxicants, adultery, communal discord, and bribery were prevalent.

This unfavorable environment, characterized by the absence of a central ethical code and the lack of any systematized or coherent religious belief, was pervasive throughout the Middle Eastern region at that time. But there were also many peace-loving people, and they yearned for religious and social reform. The combination of these factors created fertile ground for change and reformation. It was at this time and under these social and religious conditions, that the Prophet Muhammad was born.

The Life of Muhammad

It is believed that the Prophet Muhammad was born around the year 570 C.E. into a Quraish family, in the city of Mecca, in



what is today known as Saudi Arabia. His mother's name was Aminah and his father was Abdallah. His father, Abdallah died several weeks before Muhammad's birth, leaving Muhammad fatherless. Muhammad's mother, Aminah also passed away when he was only five years old. He was raised by his paternal uncle, Abu Talib.

Even as a young child, Muhammad already was different from his peers. He was calm and serene by nature. He avoided social and religious celebrations that encouraged disgraceful behaviors. Speaking the truth came naturally to Muhammad, he never imbibed intoxicants, and he always returned what was not his. He avoided the popular festivals, which he viewed as idolatrous, loud, and filled with idle talk. His good nature was well known, and he was content to earn his livelihood by the sweat of his brow. Under the guardianship of Abu Talib, he grew into adolescence and took up the job of tending camels . Later in life he married a wealthy widow.

From his early years, Muhammad enjoyed solitude. He frequently visited a hill, named Heera, in the wilderness near Mecca. He would stay in a cave there, subsisting on a few items which he would bring with him. In this cave he would spend days in worship and prayer to God (Allah). Descriptions of



Muhammad's experiences at Heera have been documented by various Muslim writers.

For example, Molana Rum relates Muhammad's description of his meditative experiences:

My ears reverberate with the sound of God. But God's sound hides from fleshly ears.

And Molana Sheikh Muhammad Akaram Sabari has written that Muhammad remained immersed in vibrant unceasing inner sound while living in this cave (*Iktbas-Ul-Anwar*, 106). Sabari also claims that the founder of the Qadari Sufi Community, Hajrat Kadar Jilani, meditated in this same cave for extended periods of time.

From these examples, it is clear that the Prophet Muhammad practiced the Yoga of Sound in the same way as various saints of different traditions. In Sufism (mystical Islam) the Yoga of Sound is known as *Sultanulajakar*, and in the Vedic tradition it is known as *Nadanusandhana* or *Surat Shabad Yoga*. This practice of the divine sound is considered to be the highest practice of the saints. It is believed that the experience of sound meditation was also attained by Muhammad Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of the Mughal Emperor of India, Shah Jahan Khan. He has written:

The entire world is filled with the divine light and sound of God. The blind still ask where God is.



Cleanse your ears that are filled with the wax of arrogance and skepticism, and then you will hear the sound in every direction coming from the heavens above. It is a mystery why we wait to hear the divine trumpet resounding on the Day of Judgment when the sweet sound of the divine trumpet resounds unceasingly. (Risala-E-Haq-Numa, 16)

Dara Shikoh also states that before Muhammad became a prophet, as well as after, he practiced the meditation of divine inner sound or Word.

Prophet Muhammad and the Divine Vision of the Angel Gabriel

By the grace of God, and through the power of spiritual discipline, the angel Gabriel appeared before Muhammad during a spiritual retreat in the cave of Heera. Muhammad was forty years of age. At the time of this divine vision of the angel Gabriel, the verses that would become the Holy *Koran*, were also revealed to Muhammad. After these events he became known as a prophet. He had full faith that Allah was the only God, and was the only true master. He told other people about the divine message he had received, and that Allah had made him a messenger for the benefit of humanity. Sometimes he was faced with distressing reactions from those who did not believe him. Such people were engrossed in traditional beliefs and found such



talk useless, and in fact, even threatening to their established beliefs. In this way he made many opponents. There were also some who were envious of his large following and recognition. So it happened that these sought to do him harm out of their jealousy.

For many years Muhammad taught the divine message in secret, tolerating many abuses. After this period Muhammad received Divine instruction to teach this message in the open. His enemies reacted adversely, continued to inflict abuses, and even threatened to take his life. Due to this increasing threat and danger, at the age of 53 Muhammad was forced to leave Mecca to take refuge in Medina. The people of Medina welcomed him wholeheartedly. It can be said that the Islamic faith actually began to spread from Medina. This year of Muhammad's migration to Medina came to be called the *Hijri* or Hijrah by the followers of Islam. The word *Hijri* literally means 'to abandon a place.' The Islamic calendar reckons the year of the *Hijri* as the first year. At the age of 63, Muhammad left this material world.

His last words were:

Every person should work toward their own liberation.



The Principles and Practices of Islam

According to Islamic doctrine, every individual [the follower of Islam] must have faith in Almighty Allah and his prophets. It is believed that a day of judgment will come when Allah will hold each human being accountable for his actions. On that day people will be judged according to their good or evil deeds.

The Five Pillars of Islam

There are five obligatory practices that are foundational to the Islamic faith. These are known as the five pillars:

1. *Kalimai Taiyab* or *Shahada*: This is the proclamation and confession that Allah is the one and only true God, and that Muhammad *Sahab* is the prophet of God. It is expected to be a public testimony of commitment made by each Muslim. This is also called *Kalima*, and it corresponds with the Vedic term *dharma mantra*.

2. *Namaj* (also referred to as *Salat* or Ritual Prayer): Five times each day there is obligatory prayer. This is preceded by ritual purification of the body by washing with water. The followers of Islam must go to a mosque every Friday to perform the afternoon prayers.

3. *Roza* or *Sawm*: This is the daily fast during the holy month of Ramajan (Ramadan). It is believed that the Divine



message, in the form of the *Koran*, was revealed to Muhammad during this month.

4. *Zakat* or *Zakaah*: Muslims should give one fortieth of their income to the poor and needy as charity. They must see this charitable act as their offering to God.

5. *Hajj*: Each Muslim is expected to travel to Mecca on pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime. Money spent to go on this pilgrimage should have been earned honestly and with pure work.

In addition to these five pillars of Islam there are other doctrines which deal with specific activities of living. Some examples of doctrines which a devout Muslim must abide by are as following:

- Muslims must not worship idols. For this reason, photos or representations of the physical form of the prophet Muhammad are not available.
- They must not eat the flesh of swine which is considered an unclean animal.
- They should not make loans that bear interest.

Muslims must also follow various rules concerning marriage and divorce. These rules are specified in *Sharia*, the body of Islamic law. In addition, Muhammad did not approve of the practice of



slavery, and he stated that it is benevolent for Muslims to free slaves. The central message of Islam is equality of all human beings.

Fundamental Beliefs of Islam

1. *Kalimaitaib: La ilaha ill-Allah, Muhammad-ur-rasool-ullah.*
“There is no God other than Allah. Muhammad is the true messenger of Allah.”

2. *Kalimai Sahadat: ashhadu a la ilaha ill-Allahu wahdahu la sharika lahu wa ashhadu anna Muham- madan 'abduhu wa rasooluh.* “I bear witness that there is no other God than Allah and I confess that Muhammad is his His messenger.”

3. *Kalimai Tamjeed: Subhana-Allahi walhamdu lillahi wa la ilaha ill-Allahu wallahu Akbar, wa la haula wa la quwwata ilia billahil 'aliyyil-'Azeem.* “Allah is pure Being. All praise and all good words pertain to Allah. There is no other God than Allah. Allah is the most great and there is no other deity greater than Him. All strength, abundance and radiance are in Allah.”

4. *Kalimai Tauhid: La ilaha ill-Allahu wahdahu la sharika lahu, lahul mulku wa lahul hamdu, Yuhyi wa Yumeetu, biyadihil-*



khairu, wa huwa 'ala kulli shai-in Qadeer. “There is none worthy of worship, but Allah; He is One and has no partner. All praises are for Him. He is the life giver and the cause of death. All well being is from Him and He has power over all things.”

5. *Kalimai Istigafar: Astaghfirullah Rabi min kulli dhanbin adhnabtahu amadan aw khataan, sirran aw alani-yatan wa atubu illaih minadh-dhanbilladhi, la a'lamu, innaka anta allamul ghayub, wa sattar ul'uyoubi, wa ghaffarudh-dhunubi, wa la hawla wa la quwwatta illa billahil alliyil 'adheem.* “I seek forgiveness for all my sins, those which I have committed knowingly as well as unknowingly. Whether they were committed in the open or in secret I ask for forgiveness for all these sins. Allah, You are the knower of the other world and our fate. You are the concealer of our sins and mistakes and the forgiver of our sins and weaknesses. There is no power or strength except from Allah, the Most High.”

6. *Kalimai Raddi-Kufr: Allahumma inni a'oozu bika min an ushrika bika shai'an wa ana a'lamu wa astaghfiruka lima la a'lamu innaka anta 'Allam ul-ghuyoobi tubtu 'anhu wa tabarr'atu 'an kulli deenin siwa deen il-Islami wa aslamtu wa aqoolu la ilaha ill-Allahu Muhammad-ur-rasool-ullah.* “O Allah! Verily I seek refuge in Thee from associating any partner with Thee



knowingly. I beseech Your forgiveness for the sins which I am not aware of. Verily, Thou art the Best Knower of all secrets. I repent for all my sins, and for any abuse, shameful discourse, back-biting, and I accept the blame for any disobedience against any of the teachings of Islam. I have taken refuge in You, and I hereby declare: There is none worthy of worship but Allah, and Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah.”

Pilgrimage to the *Ka'ba* (Hajj)

Many devout Muslims go to the *Ka'ba* for pilgrimage. This is a small sanctuary inside of a great mosque located in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. It is believed by Muslims that Abraham had this sanctuary built for the worship of Allah. In this building there is a sacred black stone. According to legend, this stone was given to Abraham by the angel Gabriel. All Muslims, no matter where they live, pray facing the holy *Ka'ba*.

The Day of Judgment

The followers of Islam do not subscribe to the theory of reincarnation. Rather, Muslims believe in a catastrophic end on the Day of Judgment. In this system, it is believed that on Judgment Day all souls will take up their physical bodies again,



and each will be judged by Allah according to their good and evil deeds. All souls will present themselves to Allah. Justice will then be administered. Each soul will be sent to heaven or hell according to its respective deeds: Those whose good deeds are in preponderance will go to heaven, while those whose evil deeds are in preponderance will go to hell. Those who go to heaven will find all comforts and joys, but those who go to hell will find torture and misery.

The *Koran*

The *Koran* (*Qur'an* in Arabic) is the sacred text of the Islamic faith. The word *Qur'an* literally means 'recitation.' Muslims believe that the actual words of the *Koran* are the words of the light of knowledge which were received by Muhammad from Angel Gabriel. It is believed that the *Koran* was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad from the time when he was 40 years old until he was of age 63, at which time the revelation was complete. The words of the *Koran* were revealed by the angel Gabriel and Muhammad transcribed them word by word.

The *Koran* contains 30 sections and 114 chapters. The chapters are called *suras*. In each chapter there are many *rukua* (pauses) within which there are many sayings of wisdom. The language



of these verses is Arabic. The *Koran* comprehensively elaborates the details of leading a moral life, as well as observing prescribed social norms. With regard to political life, the *Koran* teaches that political tenets should be predicated on the religious principles of Islam.

***Kafir* (Non-believer)**

The idea of a nonbeliever is an integral aspect of the Islamic system. However, in modern times this term has been interpreted in a most controversial tenor.

A scholar of Islam, Ahmed Bsahir, has written the following in his commentary on the *Koran*:

Kafir means 'one who denies.' According to Islam the one who denies the unity and power of God is a non-believer. Non-believers are of two kinds: Those who do not accept Islam or the unity of God. They worship other gods. The second type of non-believers pursues active opposition to the faith of Islam. Those of the second variety wage wars and commit atrocities against the Islamic faith. The atrocities perpetrated against Muhammad and his followers caused them to retreat to Mecca. With respect to the second type of non believer, the Koran recommends that wherever they are found they should be killed. Keep on killing them until there is only the rule of God (Islamic faith). Concerning the first type of non-believer, toleration is recommended by the Koran. For example, the guardian and uncle of Prophet Muhammad, named Abutalib, never converted to the Islamic tradition;



however, he was always respected by Muhammad and other Muslims. When Muhammad went to Medina the worshippers of many different gods and faiths continuously assisted and supported Muhammad.

The Community: Major Sects of Islam

After the death of Muhammad, there developed a great controversy over the question of his successor. Apparently, he had made no provision indicating the next leader of the Muslim community. As a result, the followers divided into two groups. One group thought that the rightful successor of Muhammad should be a relative. This group proclaimed Muhammad's son-in-law, Ali, to be the rightful successor. The followers of Ali are known as Shi'ite. Shi'a literally means the group of Ali. According to that tradition, Muhammad gave instructions to Ali which are not present in the *Koran*.

The second group of followers opposed the idea of the line of succession. They asserted that Abu Bakr, the Prophet's close and faithful friend, should be the successor. This group had greater public support. The follower of this group came to be known as *Sunnis*. The word *Sunni* comes from the word *sunna* which means 'the tradition of the Prophet of Islam,' 'the tried and true path.' This path is believed to be 'the one that Prophet Muhammad himself journeyed.'



Although both sects agree on the core fundamental principles of Islam they, in addition to the original conflict about succession, also had several other differences from one another with regard to their interpretations and traditions. One of the most important distinctions involves the legitimate authority within the community. The *Sunnis* always give preference to the community of the Islamic faithful in making day to day decisions. However, the *Shi'ites* consider the voice of the *Immam* (a religious leader with infallible authority) as the determining authority. On a practical level, these sects have differences in rules and times for *namaz*, call to prayer. For example, *Shi'ites* sometimes combine prayers, worshipping three times instead of five.

The Sufis

In the 11th century there arose a mystical branch of Islam, which has come to be known as Sufism. Sufis seek close, direct, and personal experience of the divine. They emphasize that realization of God can be attained in this life through faith, devotion, and meditation. Although many strands of Sufism have emerged, the core issue for Sufis is the experience of the practitioner who seeks to unite with the infinite God. A seeker



through sincere devotion and the inner light of the soul strives to be one with the Divine.

The Teachings of Islam

Islam involves a series of disciplines which are practiced daily. These practices are considered necessary to become a true human being. The prominent teachings of Islam are as follows:

1. This world is a prison house for the people of faith. However, for non-believers, this world is a heaven.
2. God is pleased with those who do not desire the world and do not desire human possessions, God will be pleased.
3. Feed the hungry and tend the sick. And if someone has been unjustly imprisoned then liberate that person. Help those who are suffering whether they are Muslim or not.
4. The worst enemies of Allah are those who accept Islam as their religion but, who are, in fact, corrupt, and needlessly shed the blood of others.
5. Allah is merciful to those who show mercy to the people of Allah. Show kindness to all people, whether they are good or evil. To show mercy to the wicked is to protect them from evil. Heavenly beings will then show mercy to you.



6. When you speak, only speak truth. If you give your word, then fulfill that promise. Fulfill your responsibilities. Do not commit adultery. Be pure and block evil thoughts from your mind. Stop your hand from harming others or from taking what is not yours.
7. The Faith instructs against acts of harm of any kind. True believers do not let others kill.
8. He is a believer who does not commit adultery, does not steal, does not take intoxicants—alcohol, drugs, etc.—and does not take that which is not his. Beware of these vices.
9. This life is preparation for the next life, like a crop which should be tended with great care for harvesting. Do good deeds so that you can harvest the good in the next life. Hard work is the royal decree of Allah. Only through hard work can the commands of Allah be obeyed.
10. A man who even has a speck of ego in his heart can not enter heaven.
11. If you face some adverse situation, it is a result of your own actions.
12. The person who spends his life in an effort to attain knowledge of God, will never die.
13. One who knows himself also knows God.



Islam and Spirituality

In the Holy *Koran* practical advice for day to day living is interwoven with subtle spiritual knowledge. Just as there are people who study the Hindu epic tale *Ramayana* without grasping its subtle teachings, there are also some readers of the *Koran* who fail to grasp the subtle teachings embedded in this Holy Book. The *Koran* contains many descriptions of the nature of God and many references to inner meditation:

1. This world is like a play or drama. In reality the next world is the best for those who desire to escape harm.
2. In the beginning all people were on one path.
3. Do not follow your selfish desires, for they will lead you astray from the path of God.
4. God is truth.
5. Those who deviate from Truth become the fuel for hell.
6. God creates the world and we create our world, and He will mark the return. Ultimately, we all must go to God (go back to the source).
7. East and West belong to God. Whichever direction you face is the direction of Allah. Allah is all pervasive and all knowing.
8. One who holds the garment of Allah [takes refuge in Him] with strength will always find the right path.



9. Those who trust God have Allah as their helper. God will take them out of darkness and bring them to light.
10. In the realm of Allah, that which will go upward is the Holy Sound. The good deeds take us upward.

The Essence of the Teachings of Islam

The Mystery of *Aliph*

It is said in the *Koran*, that ‘in the beginning all people followed one path.’ Today, however, people have strayed onto many paths and are consequently suffering in many ways. If we could just properly read the first letter of Arabic, *aliph*, then we could attain knowledge and peace. There was a great fakir (holy man) in Punjab by the name of Bulle Shah. He said that by studying *aliph* one can attain liberation. We study many books, and receive degrees, and even read *aliph* many times in a day, but we do not understand the kind of *aliph* fakir Bulle Shah is speaking about. What kind of *aliph* could bring liberation from the suffering of this world?

Hajarat Anwar Ali Rohataki, a scholar and devout Muslim, has written a book called *Kanune Ishak*. In it he says that the *aliph* which bestows liberation is not simply a letter of the alphabet of Urdu, Persian, or Arabic languages. Neither can it be written on



the chalk board. This *aliph* is without form and is the all pervasive Divine. This knowledge is a matter of experience which cannot be written. A parallel idea is found in Christianity, where God is described as the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. In mystical Judaism this same idea is known in the correspondence between the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the *aleph*, and Ultimate Reality.

When Guru Nanak (founder of Sikh Dharma) was a child he went to a *Mullah* (Muslim clergy) to study. The Clergy gave him letters from the Arabic alphabet—*aliph*, *be*, etc.—to memorize. Guru Nanak duly repeated each letter of Arabic. He asked the Clergy to tell him the meaning of *aliph*. The teacher replied that the meaning is one. Then he asked for the meaning of *be*, the second letter of the alphabet. The teacher replied, two. Guru Nanak said, “Please let me understand the *one* (One Divine Reality), before I take up the study of two.”

What kind of understanding of *aliph* was Guru Nanak referring to that enabled him to become a great sage? Muhammad himself, although not a scholar, received the verses of the Holy *Koran*. How was he able to receive and repeat the Divine Revelation? It is said that for those whose heart is pure and full



of devotion, the voice of God—Allah’s revelation—emanates in their inner being.¹

The day that we see the direct knowledge of God is the day we see all as the same. At that time you will not see the black or white or tall or small or Hindu or Muslim or Buddhist or Jain. In the animate and inanimate you will see One God.² Allah is all pervasive.

It is written in the *Koran*:

The east and west—all directions—are of Allah. Whichever direction you face, Allah faces the same direction. Allah is all pervasive and all knowing.

Now we shall consider the first letter of the Hindi alphabet, A. In Hindi we study consonants and vowels. Vowel comes first then comes then the consonant. In the same way, Allah comes first and then the Creation. In addition, within each consonant, a vowel is hidden or embedded. It is not possible to take a vowel out and separate it from a consonant in the Hindi script, in the same way, the world is permeated by God and no one can separate God from this world. This same relationship underlies the Islamic way of thinking about Allah.



The Inner Sacred Place

How are we to understand this Allah? The *Koran* says Allah is compassionate and merciful. All the saints say that we must seek the One. To know Allah it is not necessary to wander anywhere. To find Him, simply look within.

A fakir has said:

Man is oblivious to the fact of God's all pervasive and mysterious nature. The Prophet Muhammad is visible, but God is not visible with these eyes.

If you want to find Allah (*Khuda*) you must turn within. He will not be found outside and therefore, you must make your heart pure and keep your heart clean in order to invite the Divine guest within.

Another fakir has said:

Purify the heart to invite the presence of God. Leave aside thoughts of others if you want to seat God within. One heart with many worldly desires leaves no room for God. Then, there is no place for the Divine to sit in such a heart. It is heartbreaking that you go to the fake (manmade) temples and mosques, but God is only found in the inner mosque—in the pure heart.

Sa'd al-din Mahmud Shabistari (1250-1320), one of the most celebrated authors of Persian Sufism, also writes:

Go sweep out the chamber of your heart. Make it ready to be the dwelling place of the Beloved. When



you depart out, He will enter it. In you, void of yourself, will He display His beauties.³

We go to temples, mosques, churches and we build these fine structures. They become places of worship and are places to sit quietly and remember God. However, God does not live in the temple, church or mosque. The Divine temple of God is the body and He resides in the inner chamber of the heart. The Body is the mosque and within we will find Allah.

True Prayer

Once we have understood the true place of worship, we can discuss the true nature of prayer. We say prayers, but, what is a prayer in reality?

A Muslim poet says:

True prayer is bringing joy to sick and suffering beings. True prayer is giving refuge to one who has no refuge. We have learned from touching the mentor's holy feet (learning under their tutelage), that if you desire to find God, you must know yourself (your own true nature).



The Divine Unity of the Soul and Allah

Until we know ourselves, we will not be able to find God. The moment we know our self is the moment that we will find God. At that time, God will not be lost from us. That moment of self realization is the same moment that we will have God realization.

A great Sufi, Sa'd al-din Mahmud Shabistari, eloquently states:

What are "I" and "You"?

Just lattices in the niches of a lamp through which the One Light radiates.

I and You are the veils between heaven and earth; Lift this veil and you will see how all sects and religions are one.

Lift this veil and you will ask "I" and "You" do not exist. What is a mosque? What is a synagogue? What is a fire temple?⁴

We should carefully consider that it is impossible to see God with the physical eyes.

Sant Kabir Sahab says:

You cannot see God with the physical eyes. You must see God with the eyes of the soul. And, He who has seen his soul has seen God.

If one is able to recognize a drop of water, then he will be able to recognize the water of a small pot, the water of a big vessel, the water in a well, river water, and the water of a vast ocean.



He/she will then be able to see the same water in whatever form it appears. In the same way, the one who has recognized the true nature of his soul will see an elephant, a horse, a bull, a camel, a human, and even animate and inanimate creation, all as the one God. There will be no question of different castes or religions.

How to Experience the Divine Within

The question now emerges, how can we recognize this soul and God within? In order to do this, we must use specific techniques. First, one must experience the Divine light (the glory of Allah), and then one can listen to the inner Divine Sound (the Divine voice).

The *Koran* addresses this:

Oh, God of the Day of Resurrection! Kindly show me the straight path. Show me the blessed path, but not the path which will anger my Lord and cause his harsh eye to be upon me.

There are three important elements to note in this quotation. First, the path is straight. Second, it is a blessed path. And third is to ask protection from Allah's evil and harsh eye. The belief is that those people who do not act according to the *Koran* have lost the path. Gods' vengeance will be upon them. People who do evil deeds and who have strayed from the true path deserve



God's vengeance. Those who walk on the true (spiritual) path will have the kind gaze of Allah upon them.

Now we should consider carefully what is meant by 'the straight path'. In the *Koran* it is written:

Those who have faith in Allah, then Allah is their protector and helper. Allah takes them from darkness to light.

The *Koran* further elaborates on the experiences of the Divine Light when it says that Moses saw the stars, the moon and the light of the sun. These references from the *Koran* indicate movement from darkness to light. They can be compared to references in the Vedic literature. In the celebrated prayer we ask God for guidance:

Please lead me from untruth to truth, from darkness to light, and from death to immortality.

A well known Indian scholar and great teacher, Vinoba Bhave, said:

To some of our prayers God listens and to others he does not.

What kind of prayer then does God listen to? And what type of prayer does He not listen to?

Vinoba Bhave gives an example and explains:

Imagine, a train is going from Ranchi to Patna and you are sitting in that train praying to God to take you



to Patna safely, God will listen to your prayers, and will help you arrive at the Patna railway station. However, if you are praying to God to take you to Patna while sitting in a train traveling from Ranchi to Calcutta, God will not listen to that prayer, and you will reach Calcutta, not Patna. The lesson: Wherever you wish to go, first sit in the appropriate vehicle which is going to your desired destination, and then pray to reach that destination safely. In the same way, Allah is compassionate, and the one who walks on the right path—the path which leads from darkness to light—will have his prayers answered.

What is this path from darkness to light? The *Koran* gives this prayer:

Show me the straight path.

This straight path is not in the world. It is not easily found in the darkness. However, in light the path is easily discerned. What, then, is the technique for going from darkness to light? The *Koran* answers this as well: Keep your face and body firm, keep your vision fixed straight ahead in front of your nose and fix your vision on that place.

Compare this to the verses in the *Bhagavad-Gita*:

Keep your body, head and neck in a straight and erect position. Sit without moving and without looking in any direction; stare straight in front of your nose. (Bhagavad-Gita 6/13)



In the New Testament of the *Bible* it is written:

The light of the body is the eye. Therefore, if the eye is single the whole body will be full of light. However, if the eye sees evil then the whole body will be full of darkness. (Luke 11:34)

Now we should glance within and take our bearings. When we close our eyes what we see is darkness. How then do we move from darkness to light? What is the means and technique to do so? How is this path found? Muslims believe that Prophet Muhammad came to this world to show this path. He said we should walk on the straight path. This is the inner path, and it is subtle.

Sant Kabir Sahab says:

The path of devotion is very subtle. There is no desire, neither is there desire for no desire. One must always remain immersed in God.

This path of devotion is subtle, and the gross physical body is unable to tread on such a subtle path. Only the inner spirit, the soul, can go there. It is impossible to see God with the gross physical eyes. If we desire to experience God by using the gross senses of sight and touch, this will prove impossible. What then is this world? What is that God? The world is permeated with God and God permeates the world. With these eyes we are able to see a flower, but we can not see the fragrance that permeates it. We cannot experience that fragrance using the sense organs of



vision our eyes. However, we can experience it with the sense of smell, using our nose. In the same way, we can not experience God through the gross senses, but only through the soul.

Sant Kabir Sahab says:

Whoever has seen his soul (ruh) has seen God. Our true form is the essence of the Divine.

Only the soul can have a direct experience of the Divine. Where then is this true and straight path on which to reach the Divine?

One fakir answers:

This path is found in the sushumna (subtle spiritual nerve current). By traversing the sushumna one attains the Divine.

He further says:

If you want to drink the Divine nectar and to see the light of God, then you must walk the path taught by the great masters.

If you want to get a glimpse of the divine light—the celestial form of the Divine—walk straight. The aspirant may then ask: “What kind of path is this, and have others traveled this path?” The fakir assures us that this path has been well traveled, and many sages and mystics—Mansur, Sarmad, Shamz, Bu Ali, and others—have traversed its road. This is the path of pure devotion and love of the Divine, and it is not a difficult path.



Sant Tulsi Sahab says:

The path given to you is the highest goal. Tend it with great care. This secret path is not achieved merely by talking about it. This path is the inner mystery, and one should carefully tread its course.

Now today we do not have the living Prophet Muhammad with us. Who then was Prophet Muhammad, one may ask. Prophet Muhammad was the light of God, and he was the messenger, the prophet of God. He was also a fakir and great sage. Where then would we find the light of God according to the teachings of Islam?

Sant Kabir Sahab says:

My prophet (the Divine light) lives in my eyes. When I focus between my eye brows I see the light of the Divine. I live in this inner space of my heart, therein resounds the celestial music of the stringed instrument. My Beloved is always with me and takes me to the Palace of the Divine Sound.

Amir Khusro, a Muslim poet, writes:

With the blessing of my teacher Khwaja I went to the Ganga River. There I saw the great Guru Swami Ramanand. He blessed me with his grace, and my heart became pure. The radiance of God manifested in my purified heart.

How can we see this inner light? The answer: Only when you have the grace of a pure spiritual teacher. Khwaja Sahib, a Muslim fakir, says that just as Muhammad went from Mecca to



Medina, in the same way we have to leave the nine gates of the body and enter in to the tenth gate. This is the door to the divine realms (*ajna chakra*). It is reached through the practice of piercing the *ajna chakra* (the third eye, between the two eyebrows).

Now we live as slaves in the nine gated body. The gates are the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, the mouth, and two organs of excretion. We are living in this nine gated body.

Sant Radha Swami, who lived in Agra, wrote:

This body is permeated with darkness. We are under an illusion and we are deluded. Now we should search within for light and leave this nine gated body.

To repeat, as long as we live in the nine gated body we live in darkness. We must leave the nine gates and go through the tenth gate. How do we go from darkness to light, and what is the means for accomplishing this? This is only possible if an accomplished guru teaches us the path of escape from the darkness. Otherwise, we will remain in darkness.

Sant Tulsi Sahab says:

Approach an accomplished teacher with reverence and patience. He/She will tell you this mysterious path to tread the path within.



The teachers of the worldly sciences can teach those worldly subjects, but when we come to the science of spirituality, only the accomplished spiritual teacher can give these teachings of the spiritual path. All the wisdom in the sacred texts points to the importance of a teacher. This mysterious path is described in the holy books, but it cannot be found simply by the study of sacred texts. It is found by the grace and guidance of an accomplished teacher.

Saint Maharishi Mehi says:

Without the grace of an accomplished teacher, we cannot find the path. This has not happened in the past, nor will it happen in the future. It is essential to have this grace of a teacher.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji says:

O Feeble Disciples! Take refuge in Guru. Go, get the key to this (spiritual) gate from an accomplished teacher if you want to open this tenth gate, the gateway to the spiritual realms. None other has the key to open this gate.

As you open this gate you will be immersed in the Divine light of God. When you leave the nine gated body and go through the tenth gate, then you will go from darkness to light and from untruth to truth. When you are able to see this divine light then you will begin to hear the divine inner sounds. This inner sound



can not be heard with the physical ears, but only with the inner spiritual ears.

Just as we call out to a dog and he listens to us and comes to us, so also God calls out to us in the form of celestial sounds, and we also are drawn to God. We will listen to the Divine call and behold the glory of God. There is no doubt. After seeing the pure form of God, we will become pure, just as God is pure. Through this journey and experience all our suffering will end.

We should strive just as the Prophet Muhammad did, and meditate and traverse the spiritual journey within. In this way, our human body and our human birth is worth living.

A Sufi fakir, Yunus Emre has written:

We entered the house of realization, we witnessed the body. The whirling skies, the many-layered earth, the seventy-thousand veils, we found in the body. The night and the day, the planets, the words inscribed on the Holy Tablets, the hill that Moses climbed, the Temple, and Israel's trumpet, we observed in the body. Torah, Psalms, Gospel, Koran--what these books have to say, we found in the body. Everybody says these words of Yunus are true. Truth is wherever you want it. We found it all within the body.⁵



¹ Mystic Attar says: Strive to discover the mystery before life is taken from you. If while living you fail to find yourself, to know yourself, how will you be able to understand the secret of your existence when you die?

² Baba Kuhi of Shiriz, a Persian dervish poet who died in 1050 A.D., also composed these words:

*In the market, in the cloister--only God I saw.
In the valley and on the mountain--only God I saw.
Him I have seen beside me oft in tribulation,
In favour and in fortune--only God I saw.
In prayer and fasting, in praise and contemplation,
In the religion of the Prophet--only God I saw.
Neither soul nor body, accident nor substance
Qualities nor causes--only God I saw.
I opened mine eyes and by the light of His face around me,
In all the eye discovered--only God I saw.
Like a candle I was melting in His fire,
Amidst the flames out flashing--only God I saw.
Myself with mine own eyes I saw most clearly,
But when I looked with God's eyes--only God I saw.
I passed away into nothingness, I vanished,
And lo, I was the All-living--only God I saw.*

Baba Kuhi, in *The Mystics of Islam*, translated by Reynold A. Nicholson

³ Mahmud Shabistari - *Rose Garden of Mystery*

⁴ Mahmud Shabistari, *Perfume of the Desert*, translation by Andrew Harvey and Eryk Hanut.

⁵ Yunus Emre, translated by Kabir Helminski and Refik Algan, *The Drop That Became Sea*. http://wahiduddin.net/sufi/sufi_poetry.htm#Rabia%20al-Adawiyya%20al-Qaysiyya, accessed on October, 1/2005.

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Chapter Six

Sikhism





Guru Nanak Dev and Sikh Dharma



Approximately 650 years ago (around the 1500s), Indian civilization was reeling from the severe attacks of the Mughal invasions. The subsequent erosion of Indian culture was profound, and religious suppression escalated.

When the Mughal invasion was at its zenith, many people were forced to abandon their native religion and turn to Islam or face persecution. In the ensuing cultural assault, the gap between the lower and higher castes widened and the rift between various religious sects had deepened so much that the very fabric of Indian culture was threatened.

During this crucial period of social, religious and political upheaval, Guru Nanak emerged as a great reformer and guardian. His teaching and his exquisite exposition of devotional *sadhana* (practices) revived the ideals of Indian culture and helped restore Indian civilization. The surge of reform and revival began in Punjab in Northern India, and is attributed solely to Guru Nanak. He sought to establish true religion and emphasized the unity of Hindus and Muslims. He also emphasized that humans should possess the best attributes of all the castes: *Brahmin* (priest), *Kshatria* (ruler), *Vaishya*



(trader), and even *Shudra* (laborer) classes. The tradition he established is known as Sikh Dharma or Gurumat (the Path of Gurus).

The Gurus of Sikhism

The tradition of the strong relationship between spiritual preceptor (*guru*) and disciple is unique to Sikhism and is not seen elsewhere. Each of the ten *Gurus* of this tradition is unmatched in world history. They have all proven to be prominent social, political and religious leaders. They were always ready to sacrifice everything for the protection of Truth.

The names of the ten teachers (Gurus) are as follows:

1. Guru Nanak
2. Guru Angad
3. Guru Amardas
4. Guru Ramdas
5. Guru Arjundev
6. Guru Hargobind
7. Guru Hari Rai
8. Guru Harikrishan
9. Guru Teg Bhadur and
10. Guru Gobind Singh.



Descent of Guru Nanak

In former times there was a small village called Raipur in the state of Punjab, about 48 miles from Lahore. After the partition of India and Pakistan this village was reconstructed and came to be known as Talwandi Raymoi. Presently, this village is in Pakistan and is known as Nankana Sahib, the birth place of Guru Nanak.

In 15th century Punjab there lived a noble and religious man named Raibular. He was very wealthy and owned a considerable amount of property. He appointed Shri Kaluchand (the father of Guru Nanak), a good natured and compassionate person, as his manager. Kaluchand was from the *Surya* clan and was *Kshatria* by caste. He was a trustworthy man who made serious effort to honor and follow the noble path of his virtuous ancestors. His wife's Trapta Devi was cultured, kind and of a devotional disposition.

The first child born to Shri Kaluchand and his wife was a daughter named Nanaki. On October 20th, 1469, when Nanaki was five years of age, their second child, a son, was born. The infant boy was of extraordinary brilliance and is said to have smiled at his birth, instead of crying. According to tradition a



pundit was called to cast a horoscope for the newborn. The pundit studied the horoscope and declared that this child was a great soul, and predicted that he would either be a great king or a great sage. The child was named Nanak.

Childhood of Guru Nanak

From his childhood, Nanak showed signs of great spiritual promise. Whenever his mother gave him something to eat, he always shared it with his sister Nanaki and his friends before he ate himself. If a sage, mendicant, or *fakir* would come to their door, Nanak always enjoyed giving money, clothes or food to them with great generosity.

At a very early age it was clear that Nanak's proclivity was toward the divine. Whenever he heard any religious discourse, he would become absorbed in devotion with great religious fervor. He enjoyed all thoughts of the divine, and always loved chanting and reciting God's name. If Nanak happened to meet a Muslim *fakir*, he would greet him by invoking the name of Allah, *Allah Hu Akbar*. When he would meet Hindu believers, he would greet them with the names of Lord Ram and Govind, the Hindu gods. He had great charm and spread joy to all he



met. This was by way of his highly affectionate disposition and pure nature.

When Nanak was five years of age he was sent to school. His teacher was Gopal Pandha. Nanak had a prodigious memory and quickly learned whatever he was taught. On one occasion, the teacher asked Nanak to write an explanation of the practical elements of life. In response he composed a poem and wrote the following on his writing board:

God has created the whole universe and He is the One who permeates it. Whosoever serves God, his life is worth living. Why, oh foolish mind, have you forgotten this?

The teacher was astounded when he read this piece of mystical and philosophical writing. However, he tried to dissuade Nanak by stating that his ideas were impractical.

The child Nanak replied:

Human beings do not achieve true happiness from wealth or political power. True happiness is only achieved with high morals and the development of the soul.

At the advice of this teacher, Nanak's father sent his son to study the *Vedas* and scriptures with a great scholar named Pundit Vrajnath. This pundit taught the hymns of various gods and goddesses from the *Vedic* scriptures. However, young Nanak



wrote poems about the unity of God and always talked about the One Almighty God, *Parabrahman*. The students of this Pundit usually took about five or six years to achieve proficiency with his teaching, but Nanak attained full command of this knowledge in just two year. Finally, the pundit told Guru Nanak's father, "Nanak is a fountain of spiritual knowledge and I have nothing left to instruct him. He asks deep philosophical questions about religion which can only be answered by an enlightened *yogi*."

When Nanak was ten years old, Jagirdar Raibular, a local property owner, became quite fond of him. He called Nanak's father to suggest that his son must be taught Arabic and Persian languages. He assured Nanak's father that knowledge of these languages would help the child to secure a profession of high status. At that time, India was under Mughal rule. The language of the courts was Persian, and Islamic literature was primarily written in Arabic, so fluency in these languages was essential. Therefore, Nanak was sent to the school of Mullah Kutubudeen. In just two years, Nanak attained full proficiency in these very difficult languages.

It is said that Guru Nanak acquired his knowledge of Sufism and Islam from a Sufi *dervish* (ascetic), Sayad Hassan. Nanak's writings reflect his deep understanding of the foundational



teachings of Islam as well as the philosophy and literature of the Vedic tradition, including the six systems of Indian Philosophy, *Upanishads*, *Yoga Sutra*, *Bhakti Sutra*, *Tantra* and *Hatha Yoga*.

The Youth of Guru Nanak

By the age of ten, Nanak began to emerge as a bridge-builder between various religious traditions. Sometimes he would visit mosques and pray with the faithful Muslims. At other times, he would visit the Hindu Temples and chant *bhajans* with the Hindus. Nanak's family felt that he was old enough to receive the sacred thread (*janeu*), which is the Hindu rite of spiritual manhood. Therefore, an appropriate and auspicious time was set for the ceremony. Initially, it was arranged that only the higher class friends and relatives would be invited to attend the ceremony. But Nanak insisted that Muslim *fakirs*, *sadhus* and many common poor people of a lower caste should also be invited to the ceremony. His father was persuaded by his son's arguments and invited his guests, even though some of the upper caste people were not pleased with the decision.

When all of the guests were assembled and preliminary rites had been performed, the family priest, pundit Hardyal, sat Nanak down for the ceremony of receiving the sacred thread. The



pundit said: “From today I am your *guru* and you are my disciple. You must first bow your head and pray to the *Shaligram* (Lord Vishnu worshipped in an abstract form—a sacred stone).” Without hesitation the youth replied: “Why should I bow down to this stone?” The pundit responded: “Because this is a qualified (manifested) form of Lord Vishnu.” The young Nanak picked up the *Shaligram* and said: “How could this stone be the qualified form of the infinite God? If this small stone can become a deity such as Vishnu and Brahma, then should we as well consider the large mountain as the qualified form of the Infinite God? Isn’t it true that the entire universe itself is the visible and manifest form of God? And isn’t it also the case that the light of that Infinite Divine Form and His energy are ever shining in each human being? Instead of praying to this stone wouldn’t it be better to recognize God in each human being and serve them?” When the pundit heard this he was speechless. Nanak’s father became apprehensive and asked the pundit: “Why are you arguing with this naive boy? I have no idea where has he acquired such knowledge that he makes everyone speechless with his astute arguments.”

The pundit resumed the sacred thread ceremony and chanted the sacred *Gayatri mantra* (a highly revered invocation) from the *Vedas* in the ear of Nanak and instructed him: “You must repeat



this *mantra* over and over.” The boy replied with respect: “If you are giving me this *mantra* and have become my guru, are you yourself, in fact, enlightened? Have you experienced the Absolute Knowledge? Have you achieved self realization by meditation with this *mantra*? What kind of spiritual transformation should I expect within myself if I take up the use of this *mantra* and wear the sacred thread?”

The pundit explained the significance of the sacred thread: “A *Kshatriya* established in his sacred duty (*dharma*) finds it necessary to wear this sacred thread. Without this you will not get the rights of the higher castes.” Nanak asked with patience: “Please provide me a thread which will never break.” The pundit replied: “What kind of sacred thread could that be? Have you seen such a thread?” Young Nanak said: “Yes I have seen it. I have prepared it and I have worn it as well. Now listen to how this type of thread is acquired.”

Then he sang:

Let Compassion (mercy) be the cotton for making this thread; contentment is the thread and is woven with the truth. This is the true sacred thread of human beings, O Pundit! It does not break or get soiled, neither does it burn. Nanak says those who wear this thread are blessed.



The wise youth subsequently refused to wear the thread presented to him by the pundit, causing a wave of concern among all. The outraged priests called it an abomination of Hindu *Dharma*. However, the pundit who had cast Nanak's horoscope at his birth had great faith and trust in him. He told the boy Nanak: "Oh child, *rishi* (seer), all your words are true. I have worn the sacred thread for many years. I have taught religious principles for years, but it has not been my good fortune to acquire self knowledge. Now please show me this path to inner knowledge and knowledge of the Self." Nanak, the great teacher albeit youthful, gave this pundit the teaching and blessed him. The priest then experienced the mystical light of Knowledge within.

Guru Nanak remained more and more immersed in thoughts of God, and gave little importance to the day to day duties of life. After repeated demands from his father, Nanak finally agreed to enter into a business. His father gave him money so he could purchase the merchandise he would need to establish a small business. A man named Bala who was skilled in commerce accompanied the young sage at his father's request. Bala and Nanak set out on their journey. On the way, they saw a group of holy men near a jungle. The compassionate Nanak sat near the holy men and engaged them in conversation. He discovered that



these men had gone days without eating and were terribly hungry. The kind heart of the sage melted and he immediately went out to buy food for all of the *sadhus* (holy men). He spent all of his money on food to feed these holy men, and when he returned home, he was empty handed.

When Nanak's father heard the entire story from Bala he became quite upset. Nanak defended himself by explaining that the commodities he had purchased were a "true bargain" and there was no business that could be better than this. As the father listened to Nanak he became increasingly irritated with the reasoning offered by his son, and his anger grew. Finally, unable to restrain himself, he flew into a rage and began hitting his son. Nearby, Nanak's sister Nanaki could not bear to see her brother treated this way, so she ran and touched the feet of her father, begging for his mercy. This caused the father to collect himself and calm down. But he had not fully calmed down. From his perspective, Nanak's indiscretion had caused his own plans of entangling his son in business and worldly affairs to crumble.

Jagirdar Raibular, the local land owner who had encouraged Nanak to learn the languages of the court, was sympathetic to Nanak. He arrived at the scene and rebuked Nanak's father. He also told Nanak's parents that if in the future Nanak should incur



any further losses on his father's account, he would personally reimburse any losses. Then he told Nanak, "Whatever charity or good works you want to do, please obtain the money from me."

After some time Raibular arranged for the marriage of Nanaki (sister of Nanak) with Jai Ram Palta, a courtier of the King Daulat Khan Lodhi. After the wedding Nanaki moved to her husband's home, as was the tradition. Now, Nanak had no one left at home who understood his inner emotions. He began to spend much of his time in solitude with his heart engulfed in the fire of love for God. Nanak's father became concerned about his son's indifferent attitude toward worldly affairs. He considered this behavior so peculiar that he suspected his son had some kind of health disorder, or even worse, some form of mental illness. Accordingly, he called for Haridas, an *Ayurvedic* doctor (*vaidya*), to cure Nanak. As the doctor began to look for his pulse, Nanak recited the following lines:

*My father has called a vaidya (physician) for me
The poor man he searches for a pulse in my arm
The naïve vaidya does not know the reason for the
pangs in my heart.*

The doctor (*vaidya*) declared his helplessness in diagnosing or curing the disease of Nanak whose illness was none other than his yearning and mad love for God.



Time passed. One day Nanak came across Mardana, a singer who was also a master in playing the *rabab*, a string instrument. Nanak was very impressed with his music. Inspired by Nanak's knowledge, Mardana decided to stay in the tutelage of Nanak. Nanak was then 16 years of age. At this time Nanak's family became seriously concerned about his mental state. Their greatest fear was that in this state he would forsake householder life and choose the life of an ascetic. Hoping to avert such a crisis they hurriedly betrothed him to Sulakshani, the daughter of Mulchand, a pious merchant and landlord. The wise Nanak, always in accord with the larger Divine plan, allowed for his marriage to take place. However, since he was opposed to rituals and baseless customs, his wedding ceremony was not performed according to *Vedic* rites, but instead, hymns and chants, praising God, were sung on this auspicious day.

Meditation Practice (*Sadhana*)

Nanaki's husband Jairam was the manager of the Modhikhana (stores) of Nawab Daulat Khan. When Nanak was persuaded by his family to take a job, Jairam invited him to Sultanpur to meet with the Nawab (the provincial governor of the Mughal Empire). The Nawab was a good man, and was very impressed by Nanak's honest demeanor. The Nawab was captivated by



Nanak's spiritual magnetism. The Nawab consulted with his brother-in-law Raibular and promptly offered Nanak a job as the manager of the storehouse of Daulat Khan Lodhi. As would be expected, Nanak was very dedicated and sincere as a manager. He always advised his employees to work with honesty. After a few months in this position Nanak purchased a house. His family as well as his close friends Bala and Mardana, were all able to live together in his house.

Each day before the break of dawn, Nanak went for a bath in the River Vei (Bein). After immersing himself in the water, he would absorb into the depths of meditation on the banks of the river. He would then return home and spend time chanting the praises and prayers of God. Only then would he go to work at the court. Once, when Nanak was weighing an order of wheat flour, he counted loudly "one, two, three..." until he reached the number thirteen. At this point he began repeating the word "tera." In the Punjabi language the word *tera* means both "thirteen" and "thine". Nanak was repeatedly calling out the word *tera*, meaning "Thine! Thine! Thine." This induced him to become rapt in thoughts of the Divine. Many times he was so overcome with the ecstasy of God that he gave much more wheat flour than was paid for. The customers did not understand his bountiful way.



Satsang was held every evening in Nanak's home for all of his followers and devotees. He would always offer his teaching to everyone who was present, Muslim and Hindu, lower caste and upper caste. All sat together without any feeling of favoritism.

Through his presence and discourses, Baba Nanak would dissipate the clouds of religious and social delusions embedded in the hearts of the people. He taught that the purity laws, the hierarchical superiority of the upper Hindu castes, as well as the communal sentiments of the Muslim clerics, were against the spirit of truth. He taught that these sentiments actually lead seekers away from God.

Not surprisingly, the teachings of Nanak threatened both Hindu priests and Muslim clerics. For them, religion was a business and Nanak was seizing their customers. Consequently, they complained to Devadatta, the Diwan (Minister of Commerce). This suited Devadatta as he himself secretly felt threatened by the honest conduct of Nanak. The Nawab had become so taken with Nanak that it was rumored that the Nawab might even appoint Nanak as the Diwan (Minister of Commerce). Nanak had thoroughly won the trust of the Nawab, the Muslim governor.



Devadatta discovered that Nanak was abundantly giving food out of the royal treasury to the poor and needy every day. He also found out about Nanak's habit of becoming rapt and overfilling grain orders. Devadatta went to the Nawab to present his case, and had complete confidence that he would destroy Nanak's reputation. As soon as he saw the Nawab, and not being a man of self control, Devadatta got right to the point and claimed that Nanak's reckless conduct would bring the treasury to bankruptcy. He reported what Nanak had been doing and accused Nanak of depleting the Nawab's resources to the point of emptying the treasury. He warned the Nawab that bankruptcy would put an end to business in the kingdom. The Nawab became alarmed and quite fearful. He appointed the accountant Jadorai and immediately ordered an inquiry. After examining the books carefully and in the greatest detail for five days, the accountant's report was presented to the Nawab. To his astonishment, it was revealed that the money in the treasury had actually increased rather than decreased as his Devadatta had alleged. Having had his integrity questioned, Nanak promptly and humbly gave his resignation to the Diwan. Nanak stated that it was not fitting for him to continue working where there was no respect for hard work. Further, he said he did not desire to associate with a place where deceit and immorality seemed to be condoned. The Nawab then realized the conspiracy and injustice



of the situation, and offered the position of Diwan (Minister of Commerce) to Nanak. He also sent his heartfelt apologies to Nanak, pleading with him to become the Diwan. Nanak respectfully declined, and so began his life's true work—the divine mission—of Guru Nanak.

The Divine Mission

The next day, Baba Nanak went to take his morning bath in the river. But, after his first dip in the waters he remained submerged and remained as such for three days. When people found out about this incident they became overwhelmed with great concern and confusion. The Nawab and Jairam (Nanak's brother-in-law) called out for the boatmen and ordered a search with nets in the river, but the search proved futile. Nanak's sister Nanaki, his wife Sulakshani, and his two little sons became flooded with grief.

But just as swiftly as Nanak had disappeared, after three days he suddenly emerged at the same place where he had entered the river. His face was gleaming with peace and radiance. News quickly spread of this miraculous event and people began to recognize Nanak for the great sage that he was. It is thought that during those two days he was immersed in the *Samadhi* of the



Infinite. The Nawab was exceedingly happy to hear of Nanak's miraculous return. Without hesitation he offered him the job of Prime Minister of the kingdom. The saint had no interest in worldly ties or power and replied, "I have accepted the service of my true master (God) and now taking on any other service is impossible."

When Nanak returned home he gave away most of his possessions to needy people. He became increasingly detached from worldly affairs, and began to spend a good deal of his time in meditation and *satsang*. On one occasion he was asked: "Are you a Hindu or a Muslim?" Nanak replied, "With respect to my body I am not different from Hindus or from Muslims, but the divine light which is unceasingly shining within me is neither Hindu nor Muslim."

One time on a Friday, the holy day of the Muslims, the Nawab and other Muslim courtiers were going to the mosque to do their routine prayers (*namaz*). A Muslim cleric said that if Nanak believed in only one God, *Allah*, then he should join them in prayer in the mosque. So Nanak went to the mosque with them and stood in the line of Muslim worshippers. During the prayer the worshippers bent down and put their heads on the ground to show their servitude to *Allah*, but Nanak stood in silence without



taking part in the *namaz*. After the prayers the Muslim cleric questioned Nanak: “We showed our respect to God. Why did you not partake in this with us?” Baba Nanak replied, “Your prayer cannot be accepted in heaven.” The clergy asked, “Why do you say this?” Nanak replied, “Your mouth indeed was murmuring the prayers, but your mind was intent on your mare which today has given birth to a colt. Your mind was filled with fear lest the newborn colt might fall in the well. Now, you tell me, how can this kind of prayer be accepted by God?” The cleric felt embarrassed and was mortified.

The Nawab, who was listening to the conversation, asked Nanak, “Tell me, will my prayer be accepted in the heavens?” Baba Nanak replied, “Your mind also was not in the prayer. You were anticipating the arrival of the horses that you have ordered from Kandahar. Your mind was distracted by concerns about buying and selling horses.” The Nawab responded with exasperation, declaring: “Nanak is a mystic, he is a prophet. But, this is my misfortune—that I had a minister like him but now he has become a *fakir*!” The Nawab implored with devoutness, “Dervish Nanak! Please bestow upon me that light with which you came to dissipate the darkness of the world. Please show me the right path and make me your disciple.” In his divine



compassion Nanak made him his *sikh* (disciple) and the Nawab benefited immensely.

One day Daulat Khan said to Baba Nanak, “I have heard that Khizar is a living mystic. I greatly desire to have *darshan* with him (be in his presence).” Baba Nanak said, “Go, sit in meditation.” Khan complained: “My mind does not focus in meditation.” Baba Nanak said, “As you meditate, continue focusing with great intent.” Khan accepted the advice of his preceptor and diligently obeyed. As the years went by Khan became so accomplished in meditation that Pir Khizar, the mystic, personally came and fell at his feet. Due to his progress in meditation, Khan is considered to be one of the more prominent disciples of Nanak.

During this time, Nanak visited his family. He saw his sister, his brother-in-law, his wife Sulakshani, and both of his sons, Shri Chand and Lakshmi Chand. He then left to live in the jungle across the River Vei, where he spent most of his time immersed in meditation. When people came to visit him, he taught them the True *dharma* (path). Many of the visitors achieved great peace in the new way Nanak was teaching. They began to call this Way *Gurumat* (the Teaching of the Guru). Whether Hindu, Muslim, Brahmin (Hindu priest), or Shudra (lower caste), all



were becoming his disciples. No matter what their social or religious background was they began to be known simply as the disciples of Nanak. Thus, Nanak shattered the walls of communal, cultural and social status which had always stood between Hindus and Muslims, and between higher castes and lower castes.

Historical Journey to Spread the Sikh Dharma

Through persistence in inner meditation Nanak realized the nature of *atman* (inner self) and had direct experience of the Infinite. He was, no longer just thought of as Nanak, but became Guru Nanak (spiritual preceptor). He perceived the great need to dispel the darkness of hatred, hypocrisy, and animosity which permeated the earth. The sage could see that this formidable task would be difficult to accomplish if he just stayed at his home. So he set out on a divine journey for the purpose of teaching the true *dharma*. Everywhere Guru Nanak went he taught the importance of good will and moral integrity, and also emphasized devotion to the formless, unborn, Infinite Being. He taught that liberation is attained only by worship of the formless God. His words rang with magic in the ears of listeners, and they came under the captivating influence of the great master.



The Four Famous Great Journeys of Guru Nanak Dev

1. On the first journey, Guru Nanak Dev visited Eminabad where he stayed with a poor and low caste carpenter, Lalo. He chose to stay with Lalo in order to demonstrate that the laws of purity of the high castes are nothing but remnants of superstition. Next, he traveled to Haridwar (the holy city of Hindus), Delhi, Benaras, and Gaya, teaching the essence of true *dharmā*. He concluded this first journey in Jagannath Puri, (temple). Jagannath is the foremost sacred pilgrimage place for Hindus. There he taught how to perform the true *arati* (ritual devotional song of dedication) of God (Kartar, the Creator), not a mere ritual.
2. On the second journey Nanak set out toward the south. He taught his way of devotion in Arbudgiri (Koh Abu), Setubandh Rameshvar, Singhal Dweep, and other prominent places in the South of India.
3. On his third journey Nanak visited Sarmaur, Hemkut, Gourakhpur, Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet. On this journey his teaching focused on the way to meditate on one God.
4. The fourth journey was toward the west. Many stories are told about this portion of Nanak's travels. Nanak



reached Mecca, the holy city of the Muslims, via Blauchistan, where he questioned and condemned the Muslim custom of praying to the Almighty and All-pervasive God by facing only one direction. A story is told about Nanak's visit in Mecca. He lay down to sleep at night with his feet turned towards the *Kaaba* (the holy shrine of Islam). A Muslim priest kicked him and said, "It is sin to sleep with your feet towards the House of God!" Guru Nanak replied, "Turn my feet in the direction in which God is not." This so angered the *qazi* (Muslim priest) that he seized the Guru's feet and dragged them in the opposite direction. As the story is told, the priest was astounded to see that the *Kaaba* (the holy shrine) had turned around and followed the revolution of the Guru's body. Whatever direction the *qazi* moved Nanak's feet, the *Ka'ba* also moved in that direction. The priest soon realized that Nanak was not an ordinary being, but must be an omniscient sage. He sought his mercy and begged for forgiveness. Those who witnessed this miracle were mesmerized and saluted the *guru* as a supernatural being.

Guru Nanak traveled through Rume, Bagdad, and into Iran spreading his teaching of *Sat Nam* (One True



Reality). In Kabul and Kandahar he visited Hassan Abdal (now known as Punja Sahib). While in Kandahar an event transpired which shattered the pride of a Muslim *fakir* named Valikandhar.¹

Middle Years of Guru Nanak

After traveling for 25 years, teaching the glory of the True Name, Guru Nanak returned to Kartarpur and settled there. He himself had established this place. In the same year the mother and father of Guru Nanak passed away. While he was in Kartarpur, Guru Nanak engaged in meditation and *kirtan* (chanting of the Lord's name and praise). He also conducted his spiritual discourses. Whenever there was a visitor to the *ashram* (spiritual retreat center) of Guru Nanak, no one was allowed to leave hungry and all were fed.

During this period of time Guru Nanak found an apt disciple in Shri Angad. Guru Nanak decided that Guru Angad was qualified to be his successor and carry the torch of spiritual teaching. By appointing Shri Angad his successor and not his own son, Guru Nanak demonstrated that a person is not qualified for guruship by birth but by degree of knowledge and spiritual attainment.



The Evening of Life

On the 22nd of September in the year 1539 Guru Nanak was sitting under a tree in Kartarpur in his *ashram*. His face was radiant and peaceful and all his disciples were chanting spiritual hymns in devotion and great ecstasy. The sound of a special Sikh hymn called *Japaji* infused the whole *ashram*. At that time Guru Nanak drew a sheet over his body and began chanting. Reciting the glory of *Guru* he left this body and merged into the Divine forever.

After the shock of realizing what had transpired his followers began to consider the funeral arrangements. There was a considerable and heated debate between his disciples as to whether the rites should be Hindu or Muslim because all considered him to be their *guru* and master. It is said that after some time spent in this heated debate, the sheet covering Guru Nanak's body was lifted. To everyone's amazement Guru Nanak's material body had disappeared. The disciples were humbled, and they divided the sheet, giving one piece to the Muslim followers and one piece to the Hindu followers. The funeral rites were duly performed for the respective traditions using the sheet in place of the missing body of the great sage.



According to one legend, flowers were found under the sheet instead of his physical body.

***Shri Guru Granth Sahib*, the Holy Text of Sikhism**

By studying the childhood of the boy Nanak it becomes evident that Guru Nanak composed poetry prolifically. Most of his poems were composed while Guru Nanak was in the ecstasy of devotion. Even in his later life he spontaneously composed an abundance of poems and wrote some prose. All the words of Guru Nanak were first compiled by the fifth Guru Shri Arjan Dev. This sacred collection is known as the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*. The most famous hymns of Guru Nanak are *Japji*, *Patti*, *Arti*, *Dakhni Omkar*, and *Siddha Goshth*.

The *Granth Sahib* is the holy text of the Sikhs. It was initially comprised of the *banis* (sacred words; chants) of the first five gurus of the Sikh tradition. Later, the tenth guru, Shri Guru Gobind Singh added the hymns of the ninth guru, Guru Teg Bahadur. In addition, the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* includes the sayings and poems of Sheik Farid, Sant Kabir, Ravidas, Jaidev, and other prominent saints. The sacred words of the gurus also contain the essential teachings of the Hindu and Buddhist



traditions. The language of the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* is Gurumukhi, which was standardized by Guru Angad Dev.

When studying the *Granth Sahib*, one feels well acquainted with the way of communal harmony and social unity. The celestial *banis* of the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* are read and chanted daily in the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab; in Sheeshganj and Bangla Sahib *gurudwaras* (the abode of Guru; temple) located in Delhi; and in hundreds of other Sikh temples in India and throughout the world.

Central Doctrines of Sikhism

Guru Nanak taught a monotheistic view of divinity instead of the polytheistic approach. Just as many other mystics and saints, he regarded God as One, without a second. He spoke of this One Divine Reality as Truth, Timeless, Omniscient, Indescribable and Mysterious. This Reality is, indeed, the object of worship and is brimming with Love. According to Guru Nanak, one is able to have knowledge of the divine only through the grace of a spiritual preceptor.



The Sikh gurus gave the following instructions to their followers:

- Maintain brotherly feeling for all human beings; further, always be eager to help others according to the available means and required needs, either with body, mind, and material wealth.
- Follow the path of truth; practice moral integrity and maintain a virtuous character.
- Be ready to serve and defend your country and tradition (*dharma*).
- Chant the name of God, give glory to the guru (*Vah guru*), and meditate on the True Name.

The last of the ten Gurus was Guru Gobind Singh. He gathered and united his followers and named the tradition *Khalsa Panth*, the 'Pure Path.' When he initiated his disciples, he required them to wear warrior clothing for defending *dharma* (religious traditions and political freedom), including cow, Brahmin, and saints. He instructed his disciples to remain prepared for any adverse situation and to always be vigilant. To this end Guru Gobind Singh prescribed five sacred symbols to his followers, which many Sikhs keep these even today. These five requirements also known as symbols of Sikh *Dharma* are the following:



1. **Kesh:** Uncut and unshaven hair. Keeping uncut hair had been the tradition of the ancient *rishis* and sages.
2. **Kangha:** A comb to clean and groom the hair.
3. **Kacha:** Long under shorts as a symbol of celibacy and energy.
4. **Kara:** A bracelet, symbolizing discipline and moral rectitude.
5. **Kripan:** A sword for protection of *dharma* and for self defense.

A close look at the basic teachings and doctrines of Sikhism reveals that it was greatly influenced by Indian *Vedantic* philosophy as well as the fundamental philosophy and mystical aspects of Islam. For this reason, Guru Nanak, the first of the ten Gurus of Sikhism, is himself considered an icon of Hindu-Muslim unity.

Teachings of the Sikh Tradition (*Dharma*)

These selections from *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* explicate the teachings of Sikh *Dharma*:

In the association of Sadhus and Saints is found the miraculous powers as well as knowledge and wisdom.

To recite the name of God and to perform pure deeds is the highest sacred duty of all.



Attachment to family and worldly affairs bears no fruit; therefore abandon these selfish attachments.

Due to ignorance the mind has become entangled in the worldly illusion (maya). Driven by illusion as well as greed it becomes increasingly bound by actions (karmas).

Illusion (maya) is like a venomous snake which has gripped the whole world. The most astonishing truth is that those who willingly serve the snake of illusion, in fact, are devoured by her (in the form of death).

If by the grace of God one finds the association of a Saint (satsang), then illusion (maya) cannot touch that person.

The human self (jivatman) and the Supreme Self (the divine) live together. In spite of living in the same house (the body), they do not meet each other. This is because there is a wall called the ego which separates the two.

Insects, fish, bumble bees, elephant and deer are each driven by one of the five sensory attachments—sight (insect), taste (fish), smell (bumble bee), touch (elephant) and sound (deer), which eventually lead all to death's door. [How much more, then, does this describe the condition of the human being who is attracted by all of the five senses?]

Truth can only live in a pure vessel [God's true form can only reside in a pure heart]; however there are very few who have such pure lives and who are free of lying, stealing, intoxicants, killing and adultery.



The mind is very attracted to sensory objects; even if many means are employed, the mind does not desist, as its nature is to love the senses. Mind is engrossed in duality and experiences many kinds of suffering. It gives much hardship to the inner self.

Conquer this mind and then meet the Divine. After meeting the Divine there will be no suffering left.

Oh mind, why are you so engrossed in the body and attached to the ego? Consider that this body is filled with foul smells and is most impure. Whatever things you may be delighted by in the body are all marked for destruction (at the time of death).

Meditate on the form of God, repeating the Divine name while keeping the holy feet of your spiritual preceptor fixed in your heart [surrender yourself in the feet of the Guru]. Show reverence to the preceptor as though he were the Lord himself.

Those who have performed the repetition of God's name live naturally within the will of God. Even the god of death and the god of time are slaves at their holy feet.

If you keep the form of your spiritual preceptor (God) in your heart then you will have all your desires fulfilled.

Oh wandering deranged mind, remain at the guru's feet and repeat the name of God, meditating on the holy Name. Only then the god of death (Yama) will be fearful of you, and suffering will also cease to exist.



As a wave of water becomes one with the ocean, in the same way the practitioner's atma (soul) merges with the great divine light. Guru Nanak says that the veil of ignorance of the practitioner lifts, and the soul is no longer trapped in the net of illusion (maya).

Those who are ignorant of the inner celestial sounds madly pursue the pleasures of this world. They waste their precious human life and squander their time chasing these pleasures. Guru Nanak says that only one inner sound, which is OmKar, is the nectar. The one who can find this sound (submerge in the ecstasy of the divine sound) is the guru's true disciple.

The Method of Meditation

The meditation technique of Guru Nanak clearly illustrates the way to seek the divine, while living in this world.

Guru Nanak Dev explains:

Just as the lotus born from the water cannot be drowned by the rising of the waters, but always stays above the water, in the same way we are born in this world and live in this world. We should live in this world just as the lotus does and rise above the world. The water of worldliness should not be able to drown us. As the sweet fragrance from the lotus permeates the air in all directions, so also we must attain knowledge and that knowledge and glory will spread through the world as the fragrance of the lotus.



Guru Nanak gave the knowledge of the divine in this essential doctrine when he says:

God is Omkar, which is the primal sound of the universe, as well as the True Name, the Creator, the Ancient One, without fear, without hatred, Timeless, and Birth less. One can only know God by the grace of the preceptor (guru).

He clearly stated that God is beyond human comprehension, beyond the realm of time and space, beyond birth and death, and that God transcends the senses. The question arises of how to discover this God.

Guru Nanak answers:

Everything is in the house (within the body) and whoever looks outside of the house for the answer is deluded.

Our house is the one in which our body lives, and our body is the house in which the soul lives. Therefore, in this bodily house we can find everything necessary to make the journey to God. Those who look for God outside the body are deluded. The outside is delusion and the inside is the Divine (*Brahma*).

Guru Nanak says:

To find the Divine it is not necessary to go to the forest, for God is always within. He resides in every being, yet is not attached, and is always with you. As the fragrance lives in the flower and the reflection lives in the mirror, in the same way the Divine



permeates our whole being. To find it, look within. God is both within and without and is everywhere. However, without knowing our true nature we cannot dissipate the filth of delusion which obscures our knowledge and ability to recognize the Divine.

As long as we are so deluded because of our ignorance we are unable to have direct knowledge of the Divine. Through the senses we recognize the body, but we cannot recognize the soul through these same senses. We declare that our physical possessions are ours, but even as we claim this we realize they are not really part of us. The truth is we are not the possessions. We are different from these things. Similarly, when we say ‘my hand’, ‘my eyes’, ‘my nose’, and so forth, do we mean that we are those bodily parts? Of course, we do not mean that. They all are ours and we are the owner. We then ask how we can recognize the divine soul. The answer lies in this illustration given by various saints: During deep sleep we are unable to have any knowledge of this physical body; however, after waking up we recall this body, our relations and possessions. In the same manner, until we are in the three states—awake, sleep, dreamless sleep—we are unable to directly perceive our inner self and the divine. The Saints tell us that there is yet a fourth state, called the *Turiya* state, which is above the others. In this state we can directly perceive our own nature and know the divine.



Guru Nanak Dev affirms:

When there is union between the soul and the Divine, all suffering is destroyed. This union occurs by the grace of God. Once the mind is in God, then death (Kal) cannot harm a person.

In order to have direct knowledge of the Divine, Guru Nanak teaches that it is necessary to have a path. Such a path is only found through association with a Saint or spiritual preceptor. Without this help it is not possible to have direct knowledge of the Divine.

Concerning this knowledge Guru Nanak proclaims:

Dear brothers, without the spiritual preceptor (guru,) knowledge and the means for attaining this knowledge cannot be obtained.

The means of knowledge, such as devotion, grace, the removal of ego, peace and freedom, cannot be achieved without a guru.

Further:

Without the guru there is no devotion, and there is no purification of the dirt of ego, declares Nanak after much contemplation. Let no one be mistaken and remain in delusion in this world. Therefore, I (Nanak) declare that without the grace and help of the guru no one can go beyond this cycle of birth and death.

Guru Arjun Dev also underlines the importance of a *Sadguru*:

The person who does not have initiation by a preceptor lives life as a dog, pig, ass, crow or snake.



A person must become a devotee of the divine, leaving all illusions behind.

Guru Nanak says:

That preceptor is worthy who unites the aspirant with the Divine.

Guru Nanak taught the people of this present Dark Age (the *Kali Yuga*) that the Divine has abhorrence for none. God sees the ill behaved actions of humans, and even then, he does not despise people. Therefore, humans should offer worship to the Divine in their hearts.

It is said in the *Granth Sahib*:

The guru is sat guru (the enlightened teacher). By meeting with him, the heart is filled with joy and bliss. The knot of ignorance is destroyed and the ultimate abode of God is obtained.

Those who find the true guru and the true path, who perform benevolent actions, who perform righteous (*dharma*) deeds, who live a moral life, will naturally have a good name in this world, and when they leave this body they will experience happiness and bliss in the other world. The glory of the guru is sung in the following verse:

Let there be luminosity of hundreds of moons, let there be brilliance of thousands of suns; in spite of such light but without the guru (the divine light of knowledge), there is nothing but darkness (in the heart of humans).²



In this cave (deep cavity) of the body there are unlimited treasures. No matter how much you can take of these treasures they will not be depleted. Not only this, the Divine resides in this body. The question is how to obtain this treasure. It is obtained through the grace of the guru. The ones who have attained the Divine within have fullness in their inner life as well as fullness in their outer life. Their lives are full of happiness and bliss.

By taking refuge in the preceptor all spiritual abundance can be achieved. Guru Nanak elaborates on the need of *satguru* on the path to liberation:

Without serving the Guru one cannot be successful in their spiritual efforts (yoga). And without taking a true preceptor one cannot achieve liberation (mukti). Without meeting the true preceptor (sat guru) one can not find the path of the True Name. Without meeting the true preceptor, one will continue to suffer (in the fire of ego and duality). Without meeting the preceptor one is filled with egoism. Without meeting the preceptor one's life is a failure.

In this poem Guru Nanak is speaking about the path. But we must notice what he is saying about the true path (*yoga*). Guru Nanak describes the true nature of *yoga* which unites the soul to the Divine:

*Yoga is not performed simply by wearing the robes and rags of a monk,
Neither by carrying a begging bowl and scepter.
Yoga is not performed by shaving the head,*



*Nor by being a recluse.
It is not performed by witty discourse.
Yoga is performed by focusing the attention between
the two eyebrows (the one-pointed focus; Driṣṭi yoga)
and by journeying within.*

Such aspirants focus their attention within and experience the inner light and inner divine sound. These are the true *yogis*.

Guru Nanak says:

*There is a rain of nectar in the heart; and the mind
drinks the sweet nectar of the celestial sounds. The
mind, intoxicated by the sweet nectar day and night,
remains in joy.*

In the inner realms of being, there is a shower of beautiful shimmering rays of light, and also the rain of divine nectar of divine sound. In these two forms is found the true divine elixir within. There has always been a talk of this nectar in the myths and legends, but no one has seen this nectar. What is this true elixir?

Guru Nanak says:

*Those who follow the true guide (guru) find the nectar in
the form of Divine Sound.*

Guru Nanak tells us that one must seek this inner light, this inner sound, and this nectar through the following technique:

*In each heart the Divine resides hidden; each heart is
permeated with divine light.*



By intense focus one is able to break the door open and reach the Realm of the Divine. By the grace of God the door shatters, and the mind becomes immersed in the sweet drizzle of divine sound.

By focusing on the divine sound (Shabda) the consciousness goes beyond the realm of death and rebirth.

While journeying within, the seeker at first experiences the *Anahat*, the divine vibrating sound, and then the *anāhat* sound, the transcendental un-struck sound which reverberates in the depth of the soul. This is also known as *Omkar*. Through *Omkar* the entire creation came into being.

The tenth Guru, Gobind Singh sings the praise of the divine sound:

OM is the sound of the beginning. Through this sound the whole world, the earth and the sky. came into existence.

It is said in the *Prana Sagali*:

The sound is the essential essence of the world. This (Shabda) sound reverberates in the heart of each person, proclaims Guru Nanak.

Those seekers who can experience this sound find that it takes them to the Divine Realm. In this way of meeting God, the inner self finds true peace. Therefore, aspirants should meditate on the words of the guru and should abandon the ego—this is the path



to liberation. This path is taught by the Gurus of the Sikh tradition.

¹On the top of a small hill, there lived a Muslim *fakir* called Vali Kandhari who was well-known in the area for possessing miraculous powers. Mardana needed water which could only be obtained from Vali. Mardana told Vali that Guru Nanak had arrived and he advised him to see the Guru, who was a great saint of God. Vali, who claimed holiness exclusively for himself, became offended on hearing the guru's praises. He refused to give water saying that if the Guru were such a holy man, he could provide water to Mardana. When this reply was communicated to the Guru, he sent Mardana back to the Vali with a message that he (the guru) was a poor creature of God, and laid no claims to be a saint. The Vali paid no heed to this protestation and still refused to provide water. Upon this the Guru picked up one stone and a stream of water immediately issued forth. In fact this water came out from the Vali's tank which then dried up. This naturally increased Vali's rage and it is said that through his miraculous powers he hurled a small hillock upon Guru Nanak's unoffending head. The Guru, on seeing the descending hillock, held up his right hand, and as it touched the hand of the Divine Master, the hillock came to a standstill. With the divine touch, the stone melted and softened like wax and left the mark of the Master's palm indelibly deep into it. Vali Kandhari was very much astonished and at last fell at the feet of the Guru and begged for forgiveness. The Guru exclaimed, "O friend, those who live so high, should not be hard at heart like a stone." Vali was blessed by the Master.

The imprint of the Guru's hand (*Punja*) is still visible on the stone and the pool of crystal clear water still flows from there. There stands a *Gurudwara* which is known as 'Punja Sahib'. It is now situated in West Pakistan.

<http://members.dancris.com/~sikh/chap03.html>, accessed on August 28/05]

² The word *guru* literally means dispeller of darkness.

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Chapter Seven

Santmat





Santmat: An Introduction

Santmat, the Way of Sages, is also referred to as the path of saints, the teachings of saints, and as the conviction of saints and sages. It is neither a new religion nor a new sect of an existing religion. Santmat is not a new philosophical conviction, or even a new interpretation of a religious tradition. Santmat was not founded by any particular sage or saint, although it respects all equally. Further, Santmat represents the eternal and eternal wisdom and method and is in accordance with the ancient *Vedas*.¹

Santmat is a pure spiritual tradition. The teachings of Santmat integrate devotion of God with inner subtle knowledge and *yoga* disciplines. It has been spoken about by many of the saints.

Sant Tulsidas Ji sings in praise of Santmat:

I don't mean any preference here as I praise Santmat as it is spoken about in the Vedas and the Puranas.

Sant Tulsi Sahab of Hatharas states:

I don't know any other saint, guru or path. Only the path of saints I consider gratifying.

He further says:

Santmat is the quintessence. The rest is the net of illusion (maya).



Maharishi Mehi Paramhans Ji Maharaj praises the path of the saints:

Without the teachings of saints there is no liberation. I ask that you listen to this carefully. If you desire ultimate freedom then become the children of saints. By this is meant that freedom and liberation can only be attained by one who follows the path of saints with great devotion.

People who are ignorant of the knowledge of saints say that the teachings of saints are contrary to the *Vedas*. Also, those who are not fully conversant with the mystical teachings of the *Vedas* say the *Vedas* are devoid of the teachings of saints. However, Santmat refutes these erroneous claims, which are simply rooted in ignorance, and then brings understanding and harmony to these two incorrect perspectives. Santmat proclaims that the teachings of saints and the essential knowledge expounded by the *Vedas* are identical. As well, the sages and great saints of ancient times taught the same message about the Divine as the saints of today. These teachings of the saints are the same as the knowledge found in the *Vedas*. The present need is to examine these statements closely and to experience the Truth within.

As Kabir Sahab says:

The only people who find this [wisdom or Truth] are those who delve deep into the waters [of knowledge]. Those who are afraid of drowning in the water [of knowledge] only sit by its banks [and simply talk about the waters of knowledge].



If one studies deeply the words of the *rishis* (the Seers of the *Vedas*) and sages, then one will recognize the supreme harmony and corresponding agreement in the ideas.

Sant Dadu says:

*Those who have reached the supreme destiny
[understanding of Truth] all speak a single language.
The wise are of one thought and they all belong to one
caste [one mind set].*

The Importance of Santmat

People everywhere in the world desire happiness, and none want suffering or pain. Of all living beings, human life is the most advanced. Humans not only desire happiness, they also make many kinds of efforts to achieve peace and happiness on the basis of their knowledge. But the result is apparent: in the effort to find satisfaction people only find unhappiness; in an effort to find peace, even more anxiety often results. It is difficult to find a person in this world who does not have concerns and worries. It is equally difficult to find one who has found peace and happiness and is free of suffering. Each human being is in the grip of physical, mental, or natural suffering. Even those who are wealthy, strong, gifted, beautiful, and bountiful, seem to be unhappy, and have to experience some form of suffering in their lives.



What is the cause of this unhappiness? Unless we are able to know the cause of a sickness, it will be impossible to find a cure for it.

Sant Kabir Sahab asks:

You have lost an object in one place and you are looking for it in an entirely different place. How could you possibly find it?

Let us consider this dilemma in view of the way people usually attempt to find peace, joy and contentment. People wander ceaselessly through life, always seeking to acquire material resources, thinking they will thus achieve their goal of happiness. However, as the saints tell us, even if we acquire all these physical possessions—status, fame, or wealth—we are still unable to attain true peace, joy and happiness. The peace we seek is not found in the outer material world but only in the inner world of the soul. The outer manifest world is merely sensory. It is transitory and ever fleeting. But within us lives the Supreme Being whose true form is peace and bliss. The Divine is unmanifest (without physical form), eternal, and beyond the senses. Only by turning inward and ceasing the outward wandering, will we be able to attain lasting joy and eternal peace.



We can understand this through an analogy: If we throw a rock towards the sky, we find that the rock must return to the earth. And, even though the rock is flying and tumbling through the air as though it is part of the air, it will, nevertheless, soon return to the earth, since it is part of the earth. It is as though the rock, which is a part of the earth, strains to come back to earth, and finds stillness in reuniting with the earth. In the same way, we can think of the human soul, as it wanders through multiple life forms: the Hindu scriptures speak of 84 hundred thousand life forms.¹ The soul will experience suffering in the cycle of death and rebirth (*samsara*)—reincarnation after reincarnation—until it merges into the Supreme Soul (Divine), which is inseparable from the soul. The Divine exists in the soundless state, but the living soul has descended into this realm of darkness.

Maharishi Mehi Paramhans advises to begin the journey:

You have descended into this darkness from the soundless state. You are now far from your home in the soundless Divine. You are caught here in this dark realm. Therefore, at this very moment, begin your journey homeward toward that soundless state.

Through inner meditation the *jivatman* (individual soul) begins its ascent toward the soundless state where it will eventually merge with the Divine. When the soul thus experiences oneness with the Divine, it will attain ultimate peace and supreme joy.



Santmat teaches a path to the attainment of this joy and peace. This is the significance of the way of saints and the importance of Santmat.

The Principles of Santmat

Maharshi Mehi elaborates on the essential principles of Santmat in his book, *Mahrshi Mehi Padavali*:

1. Ultimate Reality is beyond any beginning or end, infinite, beyond birth, beyond the senses, all-pervading yet even beyond pervasiveness. It must, therefore, be understood as the Supreme Being. This Essential Element is known in Santmat as the Lord of All and is the foundation of all things. This Being is beyond both the inanimate and animate aspects of nature. It is without qualities and beyond qualities. Its nature is infinite, imperishable, all-powerful. It is beyond time and space, beyond sound and beyond form. It is the One without a second. The Supreme Being is beyond the scope of the mind, the intellect and the senses. This entire universe is powered by the energy of this Being. This Being is not human. It is not manifested in physical form. It has existence beyond the illusion of *maya*, and there is



nothing that exists outside of it. It is the Being which is eternal and is in existence from the beginning. Santmat considers this Being to be the Divine Reality, and this [knowing or merging with] Being is the goal of all spirituality.

2. The individual soul is an inseparable part of the Supreme Being.
3. The physical world of nature was created. It has an origin and an end.
4. The individual soul (*jīva*), bound by illusion (*māya*), remains in the cycle of death and birth. This is the cause of one's suffering. In order to escape from this cycle of death and birth we must experience realization of this Supreme Being.
5. By practicing devotion through these four techniques—*Mānas Japa* (recitation of the divine name), *Manas Dhyāna* (focus on the divine form), *Driṣṭi Sadhana* (focus on the infinitesimal point), and *Nadanusandhana Yoga* (concentration on the inner divine sounds)—the practitioner consecutively transcends the realms of darkness, light, and sound which cloak the Supreme Truth—the Divine Reality. Only in a human body an individual soul is able to achieve unity with the Divine.



[In other forms of existence, animal etc., it is not possible to tread the spiritual journey.]

6. Lying, stealing, intake of intoxicating substances, adultery, and violence (including harming other beings) are the five sins to be avoided. Eating meat or fish is also considered to be a form of violence and should be avoided. The aspirants of Santmat must abstain from these vices.²
7. The following are considered to be the requirements for the attainment liberation: Trust and belief in the Divine; commitment to seek the Divine within; devotion and service to a *sadguru*, spiritual master; *satsang*, listening to the teaching and spiritual discourse including study of the teaching of the saints and the scriptures; and *dhyana*, diligent meditation practice.

The Explanation of Santmat

1. Stillness or steadiness is the essence of *Shanti*.³
2. He who has attained *Shanti* is a saint.⁴
3. Santmat encompasses the thoughts and teachings of the saints and sages.
4. It is natural for human beings to desire *Shanti*. Inspired by this inherent desire, seers of ancient times searched for the inner



peace and found the path to attain this inner peace, and expounded this way in the ancient teachings of the *Upanishads*.⁵ Similar views have been expressed by saints in more recent times such as Guru Nanak and Kabir Sahib. They expressed their teaching in the Punjabi and Hindi vernaculars, respectively,⁶ for the inspiration and edification for the common masses. The teachings of these latter saints are referred to as Santmat.

However, the *Upanishads* are considered to be the foundation of Santmat, because they uniquely and abundantly describe the means for attaining *Shanti*, and contain a comprehensive explanation of the Divine Word-Sound which leads to the Highest Wisdom. The *Upanishads* explain the yogic techniques and present a systematic path for transcending thought in order to attain the Absolute through the use of sound (the Yoga of *Surat-Shabda*).⁷ Santmat follows the *yogic* path prescribed in the *Upanishads* and specifically, employs *Surat-Shabad Yoga* in its practices. [Therefore, it is to be understood that the teaching of the saints is a later expression and development of the teaching within the *Upanishads*.]

When viewed on the surface, the teachings of various saints sometimes seem to contradict one another [or even to contradict the principles of the *Upanishads*]. But upon deeper analysis, it



becomes apparent that there is an unbreakable unity in the spiritual views of all saints. Saints have appeared in different times and in different places, and their followers name their tradition in respect to the particular saint [for example, Kabir Panth and Dadu Panth]. The apparent differences can be attributed to variations in time, place, language, and labels given to the views, but in reality, they are the same. It also happens that excessively zealous followers tend to accentuate these seeming differences. When sectarianism and the forms of the particular time or place of the teachings of a saint are removed, the basic principles of Santmat are in unity.

Satsang

The word *satsang* is comprised of two words: *sat* and *sang*. What is *sat*? *Sat*⁸ is that which can never be destroyed and is ever-existent. It is the essential element, indestructible and beyond the limitations of time. And it is Truth or Being. *Sang* means association or contact. Thus, the word *satsang* refers to association or coming into contact with *Sat* (Truth).

In the *Bhagavad Gita* Lord Krishna states:

Whatever is Truth always exists and is never non-existent. That which is non Truth has no existence whatsoever. (2:16)



Satsang can be stratified in to following categories:

- *The First Kind of Satsang* (Association with the Divine):
What then is this element which is indestructible, has always been constant and will forever remain as such? This principle is the Supreme Being of the universe. Association with this Being, in reality, is association with Truth (*satsang*). But, what is it that could associate with this Supreme Being? Is it the body or the senses? The answer is that it is neither of these two. It is only apart from the body and senses that we will be able to associate with the Supreme Being. This is because it is only our soul that is an inseparable part of the Divine. It is only we (our soul) that are capable of merging with the Divine. Our individual soul is truth, and also, the Supreme Being is Truth. True *satsang* is the unity of the soul with the Supreme Truth. This is the highest kind of *satsang*. However, this highest kind of *satsang*, unity with the Divine, does not occur suddenly. This category of *satsang* requires many lifetimes of good actions *samskaras* (spiritual imprints and tendencies).
- *The Second Kind of Satsang* (Association with the Saints): Sant Tulsidas Ji emphasizes the association with the saints for the realization of the Divine:

“The association of the saints brings association with the Divine, and alliance with people who are



engrossed in the world leads the way back to this world again and again.”

To attain Ultimate Liberation it is essential to have association with the saints. Saints, those who have realized the true form of God, become that True Form. The accomplished great beings who have attained unity with the Divine, and who have experienced the Supreme Being even while living in this body, have become the Supreme Being [meaning they have become one with their true Divine Form]. Association with these saints is this second category of *satsang*. However, finding such a saint is not an easy task. A true saint is rare and difficult to find.

Sant Tulsidas explains in the *Ramacharitmanas*:

Without accumulation of many good deeds one will be unable to gain the association of a great saint.

When our good *karmas* permit, we are able to come to experience the association of these sentient beings. A more important point is that even if we have a direct encounter with such a saint, we often do not have the wisdom to be able to recognize a genuine sage. A great Sant Tulsi Sahab states the difficulty in recognizing a saint:

If someone says ‘I have recognized a saint,’ then I put my hands on my ears in astonishment. [It is not an easy task.]



If it were possible for ordinary people to recognize saints, then why, since antiquity, have so many great saints, sages, and prophets have been tortured, maimed and killed? Many saints throughout the ages have had to face horrible atrocities. This simply would not have happened if people were able to recognize the genuine great saints.

- *The Third Kind of Satsang* (Association with the Words and Writings of Ancient Sages and Saints): In daily life we need the guidance of a great sage or saint. Even though we might hear about or encounter many so called *mahatmas* or *sadhus*, the task of finding and identifying an accomplished guide is difficult. A truly great sage is a rarity. So, in consideration of this, how would *satsang* (association with a true saint) be possible? The answer is that we can study the teachings of the great saints of the past, because in their teaching, we will find the elaboration of the Truth. This then is the third category of *satsang*. Generally, when we speak of *satsang*, it is this third category that is meant. This kind of *satsang* includes the study of scriptures and the words and writings of the saints and prophets of the past.

As we continue diligently in this third type of *satsang*, we accumulate the meritorious *karmas* which will lead to the



meeting with a true saint. Then we will be able to do the second category of *satsang* and will have a good fortune of listening to the words of realized beings who presently reside among us. As we continue in association with a great saint, and with the saint's blessings, we will gradually begin to meditate and undertake the prescribed spiritual disciplines. By diligently practicing these disciplines, we will one day, experience the first category of *satsang*—the association with the Supreme. When we have thus accomplished the highest category of *satsang*, our life's ultimate purpose will be fulfilled. We will now examine some of the scriptures and the sayings of saints in this regard:

In the *Yajur Veda*, *satsang* is known as the *Buddhi yoga* (*dhiyam*). This is the yoga of intellectually discerning the truth. The *Yajur Veda* elaborates on the significance of the *Buddhi yoga*:

O Dear Aspirants! In order to realize the essential form of the Supreme Being, first practice the Buddhi yoga (satsang), then Mānas yoga (practice mantra and focus on the Divine form), and the Yoga of Light (Driṣṭi yoga). By these practices you will establish the ground for the realization of Divine Union.

In the *Maha Upanishad*, *satsang* is considered essential for Liberation:

On the gate of liberation are found four gate keepers endowed with wisdom. These four are: discipline,



thoughtfulness (reflection), contentment and association with saints.

Sant Tulsidas Ji sings in the praise of *satsang*:

Without the association of great saints, there is neither discourse of the Divine nor the understanding of the scriptures. Without these two, selfish attachment does not loosen its grip. And without dispelling attachment to the world one cannot attain the realm of the Divine and the true devotion that is essential to realize the Divine.

Further, he says:

Wisdom, fame, supreme salvation, attainment of all powers and kindness are all realized by the power of satsang. No other means are prescribed in the Vedas to attain these.

Sant Kabir Sahab elaborates on the purpose of *satsang*:

Discord and delusion can be removed by the power of the association of saints. For those who associate with saints, suffering dissolves and they will remain immersed in joy.

Joy arises from noble company and pain arises from association with the wicked, says Kabir, go to a place where saints dwell and their association is possible.

A great woman saint, Sahjo Bai, has also said:

Whoever comes to satsang is released from the confinements of individual caste, status and color. Even the flow of dirty water, upon reaching the holy River Ganga, becomes Ganga (loses its impurity and comes to be known as the holy river).



Sant Sundar Das Ji says:

All people have a mother and father as well as relatives and friends. It is easy to obtain sons and wives, but it is very difficult to find true satsang (association of true saints).

Sant Tulsi Sahab says:

O Aspirant! Perform satsang by subduing the mind and taking refuge in saints. Keep in your heart a ceaseless burning desire to be at the feet (tutelage) of saints.

Maharishi Mehi Paramahans Ji asks his aspirants to perform both kinds of *satsang*:

Dear Aspirants! Each day strive to do both kinds of satsang: inner and outer. Outer satsang is listening to the teachings of great saints and studying the sacred texts. Inner satsang is the practice of one-pointed meditation.

Yogi Panchanan Bhattacharya Ji says:

By association with a pure soul the mind becomes pure and the darkness of attachment is dispelled. In attending to these quotes from different saints it becomes clear that satsang is vital and very necessary for any serious spiritual seeker.



Guru: The Qualified Teacher

A *guru* is the one who gives Knowledge. In this world there are many types of knowledge. There are also many types of teachers, each proficient in their own field. For our purposes we are discussing spiritual knowledge, and our concern is with the relation to a spiritual teacher. The worldly teachers possess knowledge concerning the physical and material world. The spiritual teacher, however, is proficient in spiritual knowledge. The spiritual teacher gives knowledge of the Self, reveals the true form of the Divine, and thus brings blessing into our lives. Therefore, the seeker of spiritual knowledge must get associated with *satsang* and seek a true spiritual *guru*.

Maharishi Mehi emphasizes the importance of teacher on the path of spiritual knowledge:

Do satsang, search for a teacher, and choose an accomplished spiritual teacher. Without finding a true teacher one can not tread the path of knowledge.

The teacher is not merely a human body. He/she is knowledge incarnate. Therefore, it is only the one who is able to give the knowledge of God should be qualified as a spiritual teacher. Sant Kabir Sahab sees the *guru* as the manifestation of divine wisdom:

The Guru is a manifestation of wisdom, and an aspirant should acquire this knowledge. Without the



*understanding of true knowledge and moral principles,
there is neither a guru nor the true seeker.*

Sant Tulsidas says:

*The true teacher is the one who gives knowledge
without ignorance, who speaks about light without
darkness, and about the formless God without the God
with forms. That teacher I deem as being true.*

Who is worthy to be called a true or accomplished teacher? The true teacher is the one who has transcended the realm of ignorance and darkness and is established in the realm of knowledge and Light. The true teacher having gone beyond the material realm of forms is established in the formless state of the Infinite (the Divine). The accomplished spiritual teacher, who shows the path to experiencing the Reality, does so, only after testing this knowledge on the touchstone of his/her own personal experience. The knowledge of a true spiritual teacher is not simply based on intellectual knowledge, but also in personal experience.

Sant Kabir Sahab emphatically asserts:

*You speak what is written down [intellectual
knowledge], and I speak from what I have seen [inner
experience].*

Therefore, we need a spiritual *guru* who will not only be a knowledgeable teacher, but will also be morally sound and



actively practicing what he/she teaches. Sant Tulsidas warns against those gurus who only serve their own selfish purposes:

The teacher who takes the wealth of a student and not the suffering of the student will go to a deep hell.

The praise of the teacher is based on the fact that one can not attain knowledge without the grace of the teacher. We now present some references from the scriptures and from the writings of various saints who have elaborated on the importance and qualifications of a true spiritual teacher:

Gosvami Tulsidas Ji says:

Without the grace of a true Guru one cannot attain knowledge, and without knowledge it is not possible to practice detachment. All the Vedas proclaim that we cannot attain true contentment without deep devotion to God.

He further says,

No one can go beyond this ocean of the world without the help of Guru.

Sant Kabir Sahab considers the help of *sadguru* as an essential requisite for the spiritual journey:

Without the Guru people are lost. They wander here and there in the world and cannot find the path.

Without the help of the Guru you cannot attain knowledge in this human birth, which will be wasted.



*My spiritual preceptor and God both stand before me.
Whose feet shall I touch first? I am indebted to my
Guru and will touch his feet first, since he has taught
me the way to God.*

Guru Nanak Dev Ji also praises *sadguru*:

*Without meeting a true teacher, man is filled with ego.
Without the guru, we miss the purpose of this life,
which is to realize the Divine. Guru is my mother, guru
is my father, guru is my Lord.”*

He further says:

*Without finding a true teacher, one cannot attain
liberation.*

Tulsi Das Sahab echoes:

*Without the blessings of an accomplished murshid
(Guru) it is impossible to see beyond this world, and
the path to our destination is unreachable.*

And also:

*I am suffering in the absence of my Beloved, and life in
this world is empty without a Satguru.*

Maharishi Mehi Paramhans says:

*The Guru is greater than God’ is a famous saying.
One can not attain the Divine without the help of the
teacher, even though the Divine lives within our very
heart.*

Further:

*Without having the grace of a Guru, one cannot attain
liberation.*



Sant Dadu Dayal Ji sees *sadguru* as the one who brings spiritual transformation in his disciple:

A true Guru by his grace transforms an animal-like being into a real human being. Then the person is transformed from human to siddha (perfected being), and from siddha to God, and from God to the Formless Infinite Reality.

Sant Charan Das places *Guru* in a much superior status when he says:

A mother is a hundred times greater than a father. A mother always keeps her son in her loving care. Even when she chides the child, in her heart she is only concerned with the well-being of her child. God is a hundred times greater than a mother and the spiritual teacher is a hundred times greater than God. The Guru loves his disciple and also takes away his weaknesses.

A great mystic and devoted woman, Sahjo Bai, presents similar idea:

I may abandon Ram (God) but I can not leave my Guru. I do not see the Lord and Guru as equals. [In other words, she deems Guru higher than God since Guru holds the key to liberation.]

Whatever happens by the grace of God, or whatever does not happen, I am not concerned. But without the grace and mercy of Guru, the insight and wisdom wash away.



Saint Sundar Das sees *guru* as the purifier of worldly entanglements:

By the grace of the Guru our intelligence is refined and purified, and by the grace of the Guru the sorrows of this world are removed.

By the creation of God the soul descends [into the web of this world]; however, by the teachings of the Guru the same soul is liberated from the net of illusion and death (Yama).

Lord Mahavira, the great *tirthankara* of Jainism says:

Service to the true Guru and serving the experienced elders, and avoidance of association with ignorant people, is the path to the Spiritual Bliss.

When we look at the life of the Buddha we see that he was devoted to finding the maker of this house (body). To that end he studied at the feet of many great sages and scholars. The Buddha stated clearly our duty is to our teacher who gives us Knowledge.

The Buddha states:

The person from whom you learn the path [as taught by the Buddha] must be served [and worshipped] in the same way that a Brahmin worships the sacrificial fire.

Now we will consider some references from various texts within the Hindu tradition. It is stated in the *Maha Upanishad*:

It is difficult to abandon the sensory pleasures; it is difficult to see the true reality; and it is even more difficult to attain the state of equanimity [and tranquility] without the grace of a true preceptor.



The *Yogshikhopanishad* declares:

The Guru is [equal to] the Creator (Brahma), the Sustainer (Vishnu) and the Destroyer (Siva). No one is greater than the preceptor in all the three worlds.

Gynasankalani Tantra says:

In this body all Knowledge resides; in this body all the gods dwell; and in this body are located all pilgrimages. Only by the teaching of the Guru can all this be found.

In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Lord Krishna does not use the word *guru*, but he alludes to the giver of knowledge, when he says:

Learn this through humble submission, through inquiry, and through service, then the knowing ones, the perceivers of truth will teach you the true knowledge.

From this review of these accounts, we see that emphasis for the need of a teacher for the spiritual journey as well as praise for the *sadguru* is quite pervasive through out the teachings of the saints as well as the sacred literature.

Moral Integrity

Whether we call it our true nature [form], or the nature of God, or the nature of the soul, all are pointing to the same thing. In order to realize one's true form [nature], it is essential to practice the path of Ultimate Reality. For this purpose, it is necessary to



practice a righteous lifestyle. And further in order to realize the sacred form of the Supreme Being, it is imperative to live a moral and pure life.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji Maharaj stresses the need for purification:

*It is only in a pure, clean vessel that truth can stay.
Those who lead a pure (moral) life are rare. I seek
refuge in God: Lord, merge my essence into your
Supreme Essence!*

If we put cow dung, dirt or waste on our fingers, and then place a sweet fragrance on those fingers, we will not be able to smell the sweet fragrance. In the same way, if our hearts (and actions) are impure, then we cannot realize the sweet form of the Supreme Lord.

In the *Katha Upanishad* it is said:

The one who has not abstained from sinful acts, whose senses are not in control, and whose mind is not serene cannot attain the Supreme Reality by the practice of self-realization.

With these views in mind, the saints have given instructions to abstain from the five sins. Abstention from lying, stealing, intoxication, violence and adultery will help the seeker to effortlessly avoid unrighteous acts.



Maharishi Mehi announces:

If we are able to rid ourselves of these five sins, then how could other sins trouble us? And if we are united with truthful and pure conduct, then how could any curse harm us?

The saints have addressed the sin of violence with particular attention to the foods which are eaten. Foods produced by killing living beings, as well as foods which are not pure and fresh, are considered *tamasic*. Consumption of these types of foods is prohibited by the teachings of the saints. This includes animal products such as meat, fish, and eggs. These foods inhibit the clarity of the mind and the health of the body. There is an old saying: “Whatever kind of food we take in, its properties will also fill our mind.” There is also a parallel saying, “Whatever we eat, and just so will our breath smell [indicating the visible effect of food].”

Further, Kabir Sahab describes the relationship between thought and food:

The kind of food and drink which we consume directly influences how our mind will become. Even the quality of water which we drink will influence our speech.

These words of Kabir Sahib are not merely rhetorical conjecture, but represent direct experience. Drink one glass of milk and observe how your mind is affected. Next, drink a glass of wine and observe how the mind is affected. Or, observe the effect of



eating a sweet in comparison to the effect of taking a very small dose of opium. In this way, you can see for yourself how the mind is affected by what the person ingests. These are extreme examples, with noticeable effects. But even when the effect is subtle and barely noticeable, we are nevertheless affected by the food we consume.

A great *yogi*, Bhupendranath Ji Sanyal's thoughts on pure diet:

It is preferable to always avoid the consumption of flesh and fish. This is because in the very cells of these animals there might be bad diseases. But even more significantly, the natural vibration of these creatures is absorbed into the blood. This can create agitation and even sickness, and will destroy the natural calmness of the mind. Also, one must not take intoxicants, as this is a great breach of the spiritual path and natural duty (dharma). [Under the influence of intoxicants people are unable to discern the right path of action.]

Therefore, we must be disciplined in what we eat and drink, and by being disciplined, our wealth and spiritual path are protected. This world becomes agreeable, and so does the next world, since we are not incurring the *karmas* from killing other living beings. When a person leaves an immoral lifestyle to practice a moral life, he will not only better his own life, but also, his family and community will be favorably influenced.



Lord Buddha speaks about the benefits of a moral life:

A person who practices a moral life will benefit in five ways:

- 1. Enhanced social standing*
- 2. Increased wealth*
- 3. Greater influence in the community;*
- 4. A peaceful death*
- 5. After death the person will go to a blissful realm.*

In addition to practicing a life of moral rectitude, there are three important elements to be practiced by a person who pursues *bhakti* (devotion) to the Divine and seeks to attain liberation. The first is *stuti* (invocation); the second is *prarthana* (prayer or supplication); and the third is *upasana* (meditation).

Invocation and Supplication

We know that when we are indebted to someone, we should express our gratitude and appreciation. We also know that God has blessed us bountifully. Although we are unable to repay God for many generous blessings, we can acknowledge this goodness by chanting praises about the Divine Being. When we exalt God through song, we declare the glories of the Divine. In doing this, we remember the splendor of the Supreme Being. As a natural result, our faith in God increases. Unless we acknowledge someone's qualities, it is impossible to be faithful to that person.



Sant Tulsidas Ji says:

Without the knowledge of the nature of God it is impossible to know him. And without understanding his qualities we can not have love for God. Without love we cannot have devotion and true faith. This is as unattainable as the mixing of water and oil [which is impossible].

Therefore, in order to have devotion and faith in God it is necessary to know the majesty of God. Once the glory of God is known, our heart is attracted to God. This is a great way to keep the heart in devotion to God. Thus, it is through invocation that we extol the divine powers of God and draw the mind toward God.

After singing praises to God, we pray. Prayer is supplication with deep humility. In general, people have desires and make demands. Only the great sages do not have wants.

Kabir Sahab describes his state of desire-less-ness:

My desires are gone, as are my worries. My mind is filled with detachment.

One who does not want anything is the king of kings.

Sant Tulsidas says:

People desire sons, wealth, and fame in this world.

Why do people desire that which taints the mind?

Why do we desire these things? Sant Tulsidas ponders over this in his *Vinay Patrika*:



[Fleeting] pleasures come to us without asking, whether we are in heaven, hell, house, or forest. Why then do people work so hard to get these pleasures while they ignore the advice of the sages [to seek permanent joy]?

Why do we invest so much effort in acquiring these worldly pleasures which already come to us naturally? Let us consider as well that there is always pain involved in acquiring worldly objects, and that an even greater exertion is required to sustain them. Further, when these very same insidious sensory pleasures leave us, the distress is even more intense. This is why, the wise do not ask for things which are transitory.

The truth is that our desires should only be for something which would eliminate the desire [for worldly pleasures] itself. In reality, the only thing we should be asking God for is to achieve union with the divine. After realizing the Divine, there is nothing left to be achieved. This is the end of all wants.

Invocation and supplication are not merely concerned with the mindless muttering of requests, but rather, prayer should be the voice of our heart. God always listens to the one who calls out with a pure heart.



The *Yajur Veda* (chapter 20) presents an example of such a prayer:

Oh God, even as we unknowingly commit various sins, day and night, please forgive these offenses and ill desires. You are omnipresent, like the pervasive wind.

We have previously spoken about these practices of praising God and prayer in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Christians refer to this practice as prayer, and Muslims call it *ibadat*. We see that in all theistic religions there is this great emphasis on prayer.

Communion or Meditation Practice

In the Santmat tradition, the practices of invocation and prayer—glorification and supplication—are followed by communion through the practices of *upasana*, contemplation and meditation. The Sanskrit word *upasana* literally means ‘sitting near God.’ The saints present *upasana* in four sub-categories. The four basic practices are *Mānas japa*, *Mānas dhyāna*, *Driṣṭi sadhana* and *Nadanusandhana*.

Mānas Japa

The first of these practices *Mānas japa*, is the repetition of a Divine name, preferably the *mantra* given to the aspirant by the



teacher. This *mantra* is considered to be both sacred, and vibrant with divine energy. It purifies the heart of the practitioner.

Lord Krishna describes this practice of *japa* as the greatest of all sacrifices:

In the sacrifices I am the japa yajna (sacrifice in form of reciting the sacred name). In the immoveable things I am the Himalaya

The *Yoga Shastras* declare that by the practice of *japa* the practitioner attains supernatural powers:

By japa one attains sidhi (divine powers).

Sant Tulsidas also says that those People who recite the name of God find that their suffering vanishes. If a person practices *mānas japa* with diligence he will acquire eight kinds of supernatural powers. The *Brahmanda Purana* says that *japa* is equal to millions of prayers. The *Jabaldarshnopanishad* includes *japa* as one of the essential vows. Saint Maharishi Mehi says that *guru japa* is the best of all *japas*. It is incomparable. He says that the practice of *japa* is peace-giving by its nature, and that it bestows wealth, right action (*dharma*), desires and liberation, all the four ends of life. The aspirant can think of the teacher as a wish-fulfilling tree, and recitation of the *guru mantra* as a great austerity. Through the practice of *japa* all desires are easily fulfilled.



The *Vishnu Purana*, the *Shiva Purana*, and the *Agni Purana* speak of three types of *japa*: *Vachika japa*, *Upanshu japa*, and *Mānas japa*. According to all these scriptures *Mānas japa* is the highest form. *Vachika japa* is performed by speaking or reciting the holy name so that others can hear, and it includes chanting and reading of scripture. In *Upanshu japa* the holy name is uttered in such a way that the lips move, but the sound can only be heard by the one who is reciting. In *Mānas japa* the *mantra* or holy name is recited only internally by the mind, not with the mouth, and not by using any external expressions. Each method is beneficial, but the effects bestowed are of different orders: *Vachika japa* is ten times more spiritually powerful than ritual practices such as sacrifices; *Upanshu japa* is a hundred times more powerful than *Vachika japa*; and *Mānas japa* is a thousand times more powerful even than *Upanshu japa*.

For recitation purposes a short *mantra* is preferable. The smaller *mantra* serves as a device or a prod to help the practitioner control the mind which is as restless as an elephant in rut. Not only this, but, in addition, the *mantra* puts all the great deities (including Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva) within the control of the practitioner. Thus the practitioner obtains spiritual powers through the practice of *mantra*.



Gosvami Tulsidas Ji emphasizes the potency of *japa* practice:

The mantra that is small has such a great power that even Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and other gods come under the control of the practitioner. The short mantra is a device to control the mind which is like a mad elephant.

It is necessary to have a focused mind at the time of reciting the *mantra*. If the mind is not focused then *japa* does not yield benefit. The practitioner must pay a close attention and not let the mind wander off to various thoughts during *japa*. The constant arising of thoughts obstructs the mind from achieving the powers of the *mantra*. However, it is important to not become discouraged or impatient while trying to focus. Be diligent in this practice, success in concentration is bound to come.

Mānas Dhyāna

It is necessary to restrain the activities of the mind for the purpose of uniting the soul with the Divine. In the *Yoga Sutra* Patanjali defines *yoga* as “cessation of the mental fluctuations.” Ordinarily, the mind is continually attending to input from the five senses as they perceive this world of name and form. In order to withdraw the attention of our mind from these sensations, we have to utilize an additional means that also seems concrete. This is done in the practice of *japa* by invoking



a form of the deity through repetition of a holy name. We have already explained the details of *japa* in the previous section. It is also accomplished in *Mānas dhyāna* through mental visualization of the sacred form associated with the name of the *Guru* or deity.

In *Mānas dhyāna* the practitioner invokes a holy name and at the same time also visualizes the sacred form of the being represented by the *mantra* that is being recited. In the saint tradition, the physical form of the *Guru* is the most revered form. Kabir Sahab, Guru Nanak, and other saints have given instructions to recite the holy word ‘*Guru*’ (the one who dispels darkness of ignorance) and to visualize the sacred form of the *Guru*.

Kabir Sahab sings the praise of *Guru*:

The essential meditation is meditation on the form of the Guru; the indispensable prayer is the worship of the holy feet of the Guru; the cardinal truth is given in the words spoken by the Guru; and the fundamental truth is the pure intention of the devotee.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji says:

Meditate on the Guru within; with your tongue recite the Guru’s holy name; behold the Guru with your eyes; and listen to his words with your ears.



Sant Charan Das asks the aspirants to surrender themselves to the *Guru*:

O Aspirant! Meditate on the Guru and recite his/her name; surrender yourself [your ego] as an offering; and worship only the Guru.

Maharishi Mehi Paramhans Ji says:

The mantra that the guru gives is most pure and holy. Recite that mantra in your heart. Meditate on the auspicious form of the guru who is the most benevolent.

By this practice of reciting the *mantra* and focusing on the form of the spiritual teacher, the mind begins to be concentrated. Progress in meditation is gradual but steady. The significant effects of this practice occur when the aspirant becomes established in the focus on the form. This is when the aspirant will have all desires fulfilled.

Thus, Guru Nanak Dev Ji says:

Establish the form of the Guru in your heart, and all your wishes will be fulfilled.

A wonderful example of the effect of *Mānas dhyāna* is illustrated in a story of the *Mahabharata*. Ekalavya, a young tribal boy (from a lower caste), desired to learn the art of archery. He approached the great Guru Drona, the master of archery. However, Drona would not accept Ekalavya as his disciple because he belonged to a lower caste. But Eklavya was



determined, and he already considered Drona to be his *guru* in his heart. The boy installed a clay statue of Guru Drona near his house and began to meditate on the form of the *Guru*. He practiced archery daily with only the desire to become fully proficient in the art of archery. As a result of Ekalavya's focus and his faith in the auspices of his *Guru*, he became skilled in the art of archery, exceeding even Arjuna in his ability. This example illustrates the significance of the practice of *Mānas Dhyāna*.

These same concepts are found in Islam tradition. *Zikar* (Sufi chanting) and *fikar* (constant remembrance and focus) can be compared to *Mānas japa* and *Mānas dhyāna*. In Sufism, meditation on the form of the *Guru* is known as *Fanahfil murshid*.

Driṣṭi Yoga

Through the practice of *Mānas japa* and *Mānas dhyāna* the mind begins to become focused, but complete control of the mental fluctuations is not yet accomplished. For this purpose, the method of *Driṣṭi yoga* (yoga of focused visualization) is utilized.



Lord Rama instructed Hanuman Ji on this method when he said:

There are two seeds of the tree of the mind. The first is *prana spandana* (breathing; movement of energy) and the second is *vasana* (desire; subconscious inclinations; tendencies and impulses). Indeed with the destruction (restraining) of one of these two, the other is also destroyed (subdued).

Some spiritual aspirants try to destroy these seeds through exercises that control the movement of the breath. These breathing exercises are called *pranayama*, and they are part of *Hatha Yoga*. Other aspirants seek to eliminate the desires (*vasanas*) using the techniques and practices of *Raja Yoga* (the path of meditation), which is also known as *Driṣṭi yoga*, the *Yoga* of the Focus of the Vision. *Driṣṭi yoga* is deemed superior to *Hatha Yoga* because it can be easily practiced by householders as well as by ascetics. For this reason Lord Ram instructed Hanuman to practice *Driṣṭi yoga*:

Oh Hanuman, until the mind is controlled, one must meditate on a single element.

And what is this one element? The one element is not found in the practice of *Japa*, because the *mantra* by itself is not simply one element because there can be more than one syllable in a *mantra*. Neither is this one element found in *Mānas Dhyāna* because the physical form of the deity or *Guru* is comprised of many elements. This one element is that which is indivisible



and uni-dimensional. It is *bindu*, a singular infinitesimal point. When an aspirant undertakes the practice of the *Yoga* of Vision (*Driṣṭi yoga*) and gazes within on a point then he/she will behold the singular *bindu* of light within. This is the “one element” that Lord Rama was referring to.

The *Yoga* of Vision is known by different names in different scriptures. Some of these names are *Bindu dhyāna*, *Shushumna dhyāna*, *Shunya* (emptiness) *dhyāna*, *Nasagra* (front of the nose) *dhyāna*, *Preksha* (seeing) *dhyāna*, and *Vipashyana* (insight) *dhyāna*. The followers of the Sufi tradition call this *Sagle Naseerah*.

Driṣṭi yoga can be explained through translation of the words: *Driṣṭi* is the faculty of vision, and *Yoga* means union. Thus *Driṣṭi yoga* refers to the concentration of the dispersed vision into a focus on a single point which is beheld with the mind’s eye. The aspirant of *Driṣṭi yoga* is instructed by the preceptor to bring both beams of vision to a unity by focusing and intense gazing on a single point.

Through this practice the aspirant pierces the realm of darkness within and enters the realm of divine light. The aspirant thus moves from the microcosm (body, the material realm) to the



macrocosm (divine realm), and from the gross material world to the subtle spiritual realm where the aspirant is able to perceive the subtle divine sounds. With this connection to the subtle sounds the practitioner of *Driṣṭi yoga* is enabled to proceed further on the path. The various realms which are then experienced have been described in many sacred texts as well as in the teachings of saints. These are some of the references to *Driṣṭi Yoga* that can be found in the sacred literature:

In the *Shivasamhita* it is said:

When the aspirant brings his attention from all directions and concentrates it at the ajna chakra (in the middle of the two eyebrows) then all the karmas from the past life are destroyed with no difficulty.

The *Yogashikhopahnishad* says:

The ida nadi is on the left and the pingala is on the right. In the middle is shushumna.⁹ The one who knows this (realizes it) is the true knower of the [essence of] the Vedas.

Shri Krishna in the *Gita* teaches how to focus with your vision:

While holding the body, head and neck in a straight line, motionless and steady, one should gaze in front of his nose and not look in any other direction [meditate]..

Sant Dharni Das instructs:

Focus right in front of your nose and gaze with your inner vision. Behold! Hundreds of moons will emerge and then your whole body will fill with light.



Sant Sundar Das says:

In front of the eyes and nose [at the ajna chakra, in between the eyebrows] there lives Brahman (the Divine Being) whose nature is imperishable. At this juncture [with concentrated vision] the light emerges naturally.

Sant Kabir Sahab says:

Keep your mind focused while invoking the Divine name without even opening your mouth. Close the gate of your eyes and open the gate within.

Swami Shiv Narayana describes the technique this way:

Sit in Padma asana (crosslegged) and restrain your consciousness current (your attention) from going outward, while focusing your eyes in front of the nose, then you will ascend to Trikuti (the Three worlds of mind and matter).

Saint Gulal says:

Turn inward. See in your heart that the light pervades within.

Maharishi Mehi Paramhans says:

Unite the vision of both eyes by focusing on one point. Looking within, hear the divine sound. Search within in this way.

The *Yoga* of Vision and the experience of the divine light which follows from this practice are not only found in the Vedic scriptures. The transition from darkness to the light is described in both the *Koran* and the *Bible*.



In the *Koran* it is written:

The people who keep faith in Allah find God to be their helper. Allah takes them out from the darkness and brings them to the light.

In the *Bible* it is said:

The light of the body is the eye. If your eye becomes one then your whole body will be filled with light.

The Yoga of Sound (*Nadanusandhana*)

The *Yoga* of Sound is the highest and final practice of Santmat. In Sufism this is known as *sultanulajakar*. Through the practice of this form of meditation the aspirant realizes the Supreme Lord and becomes united with the Divine. With the practice the *Yoga* of Light the adherent leaving the realm of darkness enters the realm of light, and begins to hear the numerous divine sounds.

There are five inner realms: Gross, Subtle, Causal, Supra-causal and *Kaivalya* (a state of oneness and unity). There is a specific sound at the center of each realm. These constitute the five central sounds. With reference to these sounds Kabir Sahab says:

The five different kinds of sounds reverberate within, and thirty six kinds of divine melodies are also found within.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji also describes five kinds of sounds:

There resound five kinds of sound.



Maharishi Mehi Paramhans Ji says:

Five celestial melodies resound within. Listen to each one of these.

In fact, the sound possesses a quality that attracts the attention of the listener. Every central sound flows from the highest realm downward to the lower realm and then directly connects to the center of that realm. The aspirant enters the process by attending to the sound of the gross realm, centering, and then following that sound as it leads to the realm above, which is the subtle realm. Upon reaching the subtle realm, the sound of the causal realm is experienced. This sound will eventually draw the practitioner from the Subtle to the Causal realm. And so the aspirant proceeds until reaching the Highest realm. Thus, the practitioner progressively grasps increasingly subtler and more powerful inner sounds and thereby progresses to the realm immediately higher.

In the final stages of this practice, the aspirant goes beyond the veil of material creation and reaches the realm of *Kaivalya* (a state of absolute freedom from conditioned existence). This is where the soul comes to experience the Divine. But even in this realm there is a thin veil, and complete union with the Divine is not yet possible. Upon acquiring the final essential sound in *Kaivalya*, the soul ascends upward to the *Nihshabad* (Absolute



Soundless State, a state of Absolute Unity). There the soul becomes one with the Divine.

Gosvami Tulsidas describes this state as follows:

Just as the flowing water of a river enters the ocean and becomes one with it, in the same way the individual soul merges with the Divine and becomes one with it. This is the end of the cycle of death and birth.

The sacred texts of the Indian traditions refer to the eternal sound by various names, including, *Anahat nad*, *Adi Shabad*, *Adi Nad* (sound of the beginning), *RamNam* (pervasive sound), *Sat Nam* (true name), *Pranwadhvani* (primal sound), *Omkar* (sound before the beginning), and *Udgitha*.

Other world traditions have names for this eternal sound as well. The ancient Greeks referred to this eternal sound as the *logos*. The Stoics spoke of *logos* as the Universal Reason, through which all things came be. It is also the principle governing and permeating the world. The Greek term *logos* was also used by Philo of Alexandria, a first century philosopher of Judaism, who understood it to mean the mind of God revealed as creation. Early Christians used the term *logos* to speak about Jesus. They identified him as the incarnation of the *Logos* (the Word of God).



In the Jewish Targum literature the term *memra* (Armaic/Hebrew for “word”) is used to indicate the Word (or mind) of God by which the universe is created. In Christian tradition, the eternal sound (the Word) is known as the Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost. Maulana Rumi, a Sufi, called it *ism-e-azam* (word of words; the Highest Name). Sant Shums Tabarejz, an illustrious mystic of Persia calls it *Saut*. He says:

*World came into being through Saut (Shabad or Sound Principle). And from Saut spread all light.*¹⁰

Muhammad Dara Shikoh also speaks about the divine sound:

This whole world is permeated with the sound and the light of God. Even so, people are blind and they ask, ‘Where is God?’ You must take the cotton of deceit and egoism out of your ears. Then you can hear the sound of God.

In Chinese Taoism, the sound is known as *Tao*.¹¹ The Theosophical Society calls this the *voice of the silence*. There are references to the divine sounds in Tibetan Buddhism as well. For example, the Tibetan Buddhist Yogi Milarepa speaks about the experience of the stillness of sound.¹²

Thus we see that various saints and sacred texts known throughout the world celebrate the glory of this Divine sound. Ancient Scriptures of India permeate with the songs in admiration of the Divine sound:



Without the divine sound there is no knowledge, and without the divine sound there is no well being. Sound is the highest form of light, and sound is the highest form of the Divine.

This is a foundational teaching of the *Vedas*:

From sound (the Sound Current or Vibration) the world came into existence. Sound is the nectar, and it is birth and death; it is the beginning and the end.

Sant Kabir Sahib elaborates on the transforming power of the Divine Sound through an analogy based on a classical Indian myth about a magical stone (or philosopher's stone), the *Paras*, which transforms anything made of iron into gold upon touching. Sant Kabir Sahab uses this image to show that those who grasp this essential, eternal sound are liberated from the cycle of birth and death:

The sound of the beginning is like the Paras, and the mind is impure, like an iron tablet. When the mind comes into contact with the celestial sound, it is purified [transformed into its Pure Essential Nature, just as the iron tablet in the myth] and is freed from the bondage of attachment.



The Primordial Sound—*Adi Shabda*—and the Creation of the Universe

The primordial sound is self-existent and all manifestation is from this essential Sound. It is life-principle of the entire creation.

In the *Rig Veda* it is said: *Ekoham bahusyami.*

[In God the will (vibration) arose.] I am one, let me be many.

From the divine will (vibration) the primordial sound manifested and the cosmos was created, unfolding from subtle to gross. The *Bible* speaks about this as well, in both the Hebrew and Christian testaments. This *Genesis* account of creation, fundamental to both Judaism and Christianity, begins with the voice of God speaking (vibrating):

God said (sound vibrated), 'Let there be light.'

And in the following days, various forms of creation unfolded.

The Gospel of John refers to this primeval sound:

In the beginning was the word, the word was with God, and the word was God.

In a parallel telling, the *Koran Sharif* says:

God said Kun (be) and so it [the creation] happened.



Sant Kabir Sahab says:

O Seekers! Practice the Sound Yoga. From this Sound everything has become manifest. Pursue that Sound and grasp it.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji says:

*The earth and sky were made by Shabd,
Shabd has been the source of all light.
The whole creation sprang from Shabd,
O Nanak! Shabd is the very life of life.*

We find that many of the saints and various sacred texts of India praise the *Yoga* of Divine Sound. The following are a few additional passages from the sacred texts and from the saint literature that elaborate on the Divine Sound and the *Yoga* of Sound:

Adi Shankaracharya praises the essential practice of the *Yoga* of Divine Sound when he says:

Oh Yoga of Sound I bow to you. You establish us in the Supreme Abode. Due to your blessings and grace my prana (breath) and mind merge in the highest abode of God (Vishnu).

It is said in the *Nadavindu Upanishad*:

Mind, like an elephant in rut, runs after the pleasures of the world. Nada (Sound) Yoga serves as the sharp prod to curb that wandering mind.

Dhyanvindu Upanishad describes the Supreme Soundless state:

Beyond the anahat sound (the unstruck mystical sound), the realm of soundlessness (the State of



Supreme Silence also known as Brahman) exists. Yogis consider this realm to be the highest. In this realm, all doubts perish.

Brahmavindupanishad:

There are two kinds of Knowledge (Awareness). One is Shabad Brahman (the Primordial Sound), [Saguna Brahman], and the other is Para Brahman (Supreme Being) [Nirguna Brahman]. The practitioner who becomes proficient in Shabad Brahman reaches Para Brahman.

Shivanarayana Swami says:

O mind, keep focusing! The mystical sounds are reverberating within.

Sant Kabir Sahab says:

Search for that essential sound and control the mind. This is a very effortless path (Yoga). The primordial sound is our true essence; this body is transitory.

Guru Nanak Dev says:

The one who shows you your home (eternal abode, God) within your home (your body, in which this soul resides), is the truly benevolent sat guru (true teacher). The melodious sound of the five divine instruments and the essential sound are reverberating in the depth of your being.

Maharishi Mehi Paramhans says:

Focus your consciousness current in the sushumna [in the middle of two eyebrows]. By doing so you will know the original sound and your cycle of birth and death will end.



Conclusion

When we study the different religions of the world, we find that at the root and dissemination of each, there was some true saint, prophet or sage who undertook intense meditation and profound spiritual effort. The great beings—saints, prophets, sages—first realize within themselves the true nature of the Divine through meditation in solitude. Then they bring forth this knowledge and teach other people the path of peace and well being. When their followers increase, these teachings often take the form of a new religion or sect. Due to geographical, cultural and temporal variations it is predictable that these religions will appear to differ considerably. These contextual differences are the reason that each religion has its distinct deities, rituals and practices.

People encounter the outward symbols and convictions of a religion, at first, and are attracted to a religion according to their own personal preferences. This is a natural human response. However, a true seeker of Truth will pursue truth to the deepest core of these religions, and there, the seeker will find that the center of all religious paths is essentially the same. Every one of these religions is erected upon the foundation of the Infinite Supreme Being (Reality) whose nature is Truth and Peace. [Even in the traditions where the founder of the system does not



directly speak of “God” as was the case with the Buddha, the path that he taught reflects the human search for eternal Wisdom, Truth (*Satya*), inner peace, and a state of transcendence (*nirvana*).

Generally speaking, all religions contain prayers, invocations, meditations, and moral injunctions. They each elaborate on the nature of the Divine, the soul, liberation from suffering, heaven and hell, and other basics. Each religion presents the core truth in local language and familiar symbols.

The *Rig Veda*, the ancient text of Hindu *dharma*, says:
The Truth is one, but the Wise [sages] speak of it in various ways.

The Divine Reality is One, but God is known by many names. Vedic people call God *Brahman* or *Ishvara*; Christians call the Divine, Christ or Lord; Muslims, *Allah*; Buddhists, Buddha; the Jewish people call God *Yahweh*. The Chinese call the Divine Reality *Tao*. The Parsees call It *Ahurmazd*. The unity of the divine is also proclaimed in these various religions. One of the central pillars of the Islamic faith is the call to faith, which states that there is none other worthy of worship except *Allah*. Christians also proclaim that God is One. The prayer at the heart of Judaism states: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is One.”



In each of the religious traditions, the key ideas are expressed in words derived from the language of its cultural origins. For example, the Vedic tradition, based in the Sanskrit language, uses the word *prarthana* to refer to prayer. Muslims, using Arabic language call their prayer *ibadat*. Each of these religions speaks of the basic concepts of like heaven and hell in their root languages. For example, Hindus refer to heaven as *svarga*, hell is called *narak*, and liberation is called *moksha*. Muslims call these *bahisht*, *dozak*, and *nazat* in their language.

Many foundational religious stories are common to the various religions, and are expressed in words that derive from the root languages of the traditions. An example of this can be seen in the stories about the origin of human beings. In the Vedic tradition, the first human ancestors are Shatrupa and Manu and since humans are children of Manu we are called man. In the monotheistic religions—Judaism, Islam and Christianity—all human beings are considered to be descended from Adam and Eve. In the Arabic language, the word ‘man’ is derived from *admi*. In ancient Hebrew the word for ‘man’ was *adam*.

Another example of this type of corresponding ideas found within various traditions is the motif of holy water. For example, in the Vedic tradition the water from the River Ganga is



considered to be holy. In the Islamic tradition, *Abe Zumzum's* water is considered holy. And in Christianity, the River Jordan, where John the Baptist conducted much of his ministry and where Jesus Christ was baptized still retains the mystique of a holy river.

In each of the religions we have been considering, including the Vedic, Islamic and Christian paths, a basic requirement is a life of moral rectitude. Each system emphasizes that the adherents must abstain from vices such as lying, stealing, intoxicants, killing and adultery.

Thus, it can be seen that a careful study of the essential elements of these various religious traditions reveals an underlying unity. The outward differences in the practices reflect cultural differences related to origins, languages, and time. As each religion comes to expression through different groups of people using different languages in different countries, diversity is bound to emerge in the outer structure of the religious systems. It is natural that different languages give rise to different terminology. Nevertheless, it remains evident that the underlying essence (Truth) of each religion is the same, which is experienced within. Even though the particular saints and sages of each religion experience and teach wisdom within their



respective cultures and religions, all of their essential teachings express the same essential truths. As a concluding summary we once again offer these words of Maharishi Mehi Paramhans Ji Maharaj:

In different times and different places saints appear and their followers name their religion according to the sage or saint who propounded that tradition. These differences can be attributed to time, place, and language. This gives rise to various labels for the common views held by all religions. Likewise, due to excessively zealous followers, these seeming differences are often amplified. When all sectarianism and the temporal and linguistic aspects are removed, the basic principles of all the saints are in accord and the voices of the saints are in harmony.

¹ The various religions of India shed light on the cycle of death and rebirth.

² In Buddhism these five abstinences are known as the *Panch Shila* (the Five Precepts).

³ *Shanti* is a Sanskrit word which can be understood in English as peace, tranquility, and bliss. It is the peace which results from participation in some degree of Divine communion.

⁴ The term “Sant” is derived from the Sanskrit *Sat* (truth, reality). Thus the “one who knows the Truth,” and who has experienced Ultimate Reality. Even though the word *sant* does not cognate with “Saint” it is often translated in English “Saint.” In this book, for the sake of convenience, we use the words ‘sant’ and ‘saint’ interchangeably. A saint in the Santmat tradition is one who experiences the mystical state; it is a title conferred because of yogic achievements. This is different from the way this word is commonly understood in Western traditions, where a saint is considered to be morally correct and is only canonized as a saint after death on the basis of some form of miracle that he/she had performed during their life times. In the Santmat tradition, saint is a living person who leads a moral life and has achieved realization of the Divine. Clearly, many of those who are considered to be saints in the Western view would also be included in the Santmat definition of saint.



⁵ The *Upanishads* are ancient Vedic texts that define and categorize the mystical teachings and the philosophy of Yoga. In the chapter on the Vedanta, we have dealt with these teaching in great detail.

⁶ The seers of the *Upanishads* composed in the Sanskrit language. This was not a language of the common people. Guru Nanak and Kabir Sahab describe the same *Upanishadic* views in languages understood by the common man.

⁷ *Surat Shabad Yoga* is the practice of transcending the mind in order to enter the level beyond the mind. This is the level of ultimate unity. The vehicle for this inward journey is sound.

⁸ The Sanskrit word *sat* has several meanings: Truth, Being, and Reality.

⁹ The *Ida*, *Pinagla*, and *Sushumna* are the subtle channels or energies.

¹⁰ “Man is not only formed by vibrations, but he lives and moves in them. They surround him as the fish is surrounded by water, and he contains them within him as the fish tank contains water.” (Hazrat Inayat Khan)

¹¹ In *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu says:

The Tao that can be expressed is not the eternal Tao;

The name that can be defined is not the real name.

¹² There is a well-known image of the Tibetan poet and mystic Milarepa, sitting in his familiar listening posture, with his right hand cupped over his right ear. In this passage the mystic beckons:

Enter the garden of sacred sounds with a concentrated mind.

Sit still in a comfortable position.

Let the sounds float around and into the body, effortlessly.

Join in and chant the sound OM or HUM, whichever is more pleasing.

Listen to the resonance of the sound.

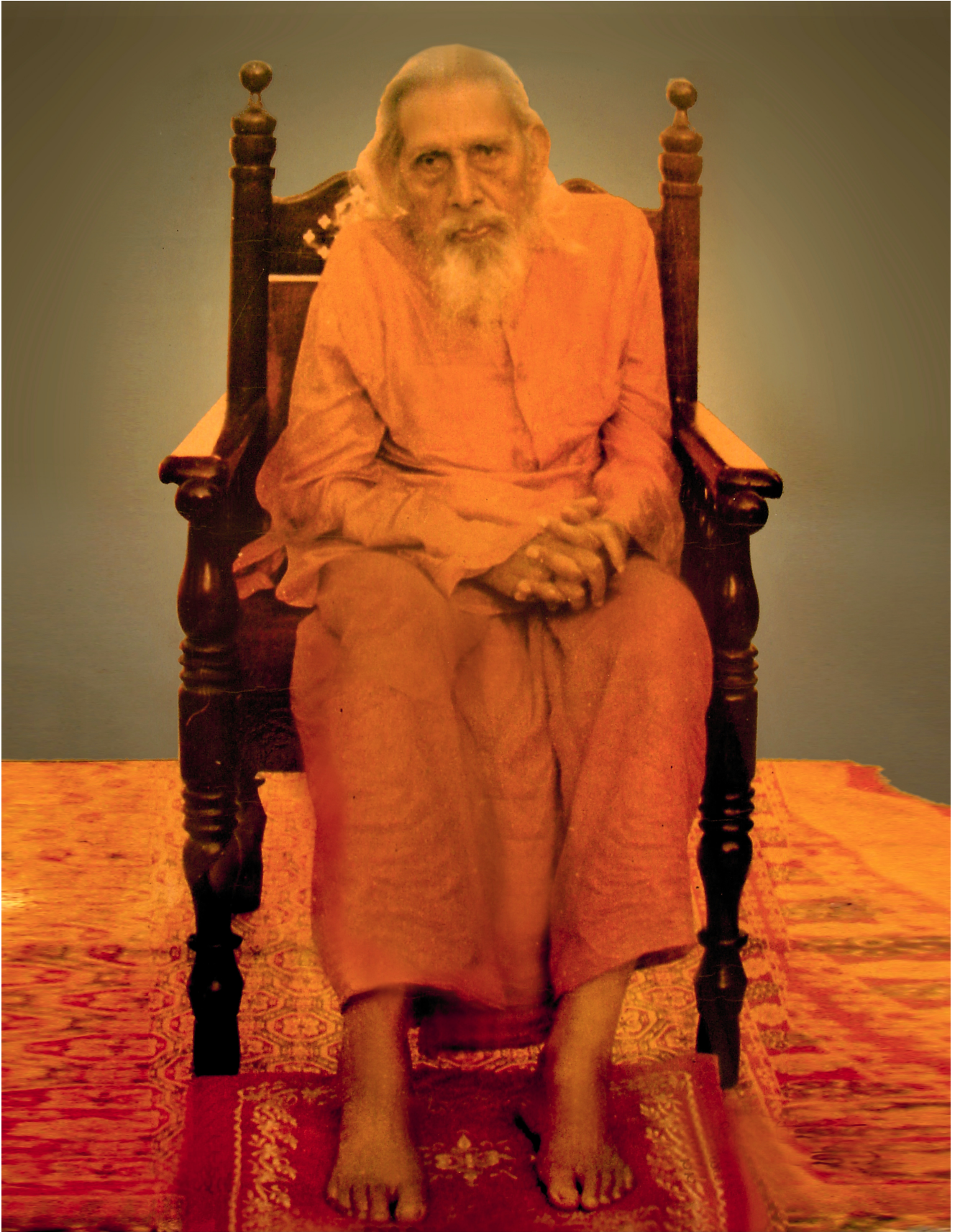
Close the ears with index fingers, chant hum and experience the resonance within.

In moments of silence stretch the ears to hear the farthest star.

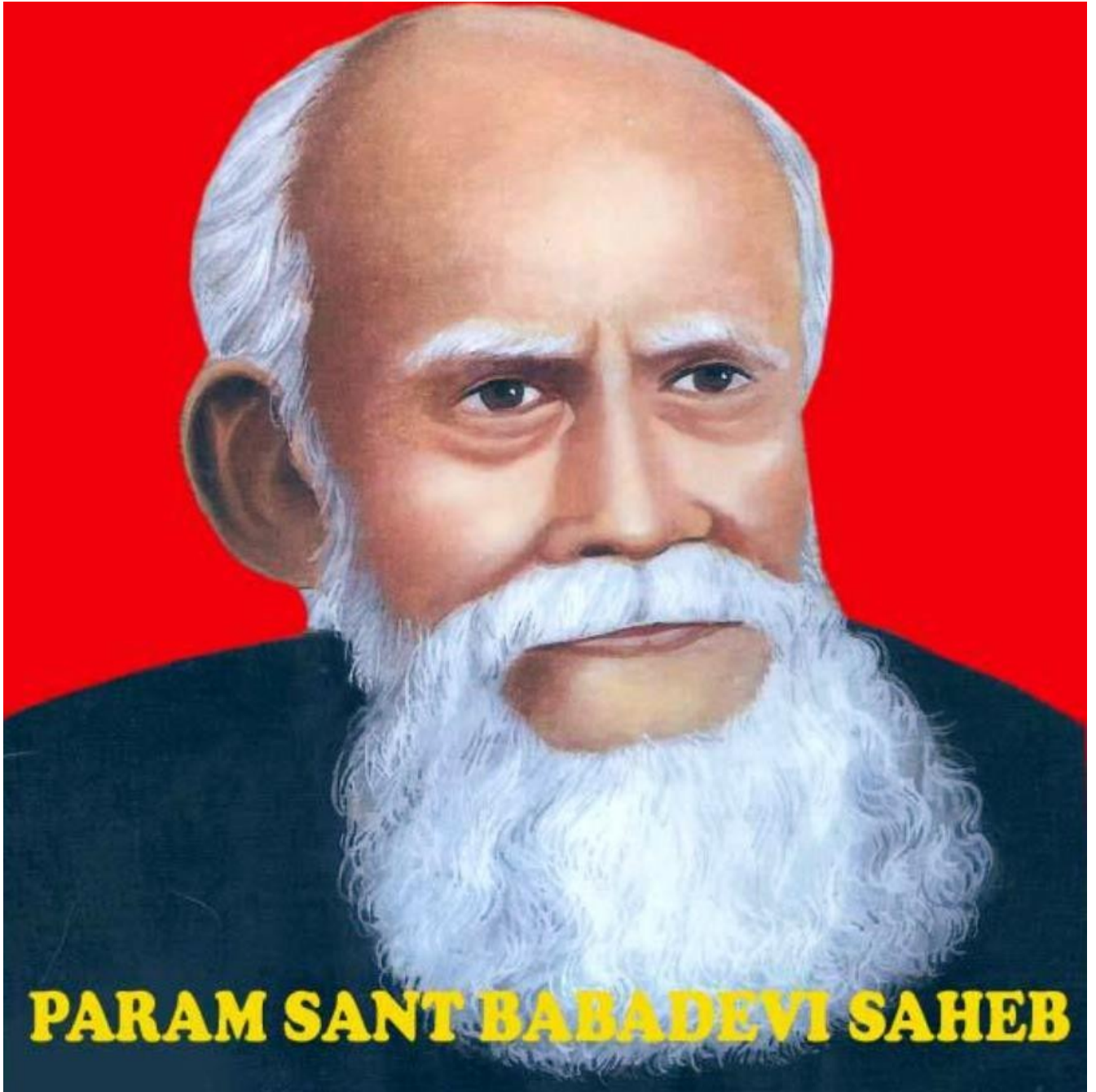
Experience the stillness of sound.

When leaving the space retain the inner resonance to experience the world anew.





सद्गुरु महर्षि मेँहीँ परमहंसजी महाराज



PARAM SANT BABADEVI SAHEB

